

**BOUND TOGETHER: MASTERS AND SLAVES ON THE KANSAS-
MISSOURI BORDER, 1825-1865**

By

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Abstract

“Bound Together” chronicles the rise and fall of the slave system on the Kansas-Missouri border from the earliest years of American settlement in the 1820s to the end of the Civil War. This work uses nineteen counties along the border—a distinct site of conflict and turmoil over the extension of slavery—as a microcosm of how, in certain key ways, slavery in the American West resembled the established institution associated with the South. Although slavery in the border region did not come in the form of large plantation complexes, the small-scale slaveholding that existed on this line very closely resembled slavery as it had developed in Upper South states such as Tennessee and Kentucky. This small-scale system was one characterized by an active slave hiring market, diverse forms of employment, a prevalence of abroad marriages, and closer contact between slaves and slaveholders. Both slaveowners and non-slaveholding whites from the South effectively transplanted the customs and beliefs that had dominated the slaveholding culture in their home states and imposed them on a smaller institution. Yet, slave agency dictated that the struggle for control over slave mobility and physical spaces manifested itself as an intricate (and sometimes infinitely subtle) process of negotiation, not as a hegemonic institution of white control that left no room for middle ground. Slavery (not merely the political conversation over slavery’s expansion) was in fact central to the establishment of these frontier communities, making clear that enslaved African Americans were a significant presence in the

narrative of Bleeding Kansas and the Civil War. The story of their experiences on the Kansas-Missouri line illustrates how chattel slavery could flourish—albeit briefly—in frontier communities on the periphery of Southern influence.

Acknowledgements

Although I did not know it at the time, an internship at the Kansas State Historical Society in the summer between my sophomore and junior years of college inspired an unwavering interest in the Bleeding Kansas era that culminated in this dissertation. As a relatively recent emigrant to the state, my knowledge of Bleeding Kansas prior to that summer had consisted only of the basics presented in textbooks or in the college U. S. survey course. As my internship came to a close, I realized that my intellectual trajectory had taken an unexpected—but ultimately fruitful—turn. I extend the deepest gratitude to my colleagues and friends at the Kansas State Historical Society, who welcomed me into the archives that summer. Each of them has contributed to my research in a myriad of ways that go beyond simple helpfulness. I would like to personally thank Matt Veatch, Teresa Coble, Bob Garcia, Bill Grace, Linn Fredericksen, Bob Knecht, Nancy Sherbert, Virgil Dean, and Pat Michaelis for their assistance and encouragement over the past several years.

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Furthermore, I would be remiss if I did not thank the staff of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, who faithfully shipped their collections to the reading room at the University of Missouri—Kansas City campus so I could avoid lengthy research trips to Columbia and conserve valuable research time. Several archivists at the Spencer Research Library, including Deborah Dandridge, Letha Johnson, and Sherry Williams, have also been a great help. Librarians at the Midwest Genealogy Center, the staff of the Central Plains branch of the National Archives, and archivists at the Jackson County Historical Society (particularly David Jackson) have done much to aid the development of this dissertation.

Also, thanks to my dissertation writing group and graduate colleagues for their eagerness to discuss this project over coffee at Milton's or Café Mirth. Their thoughtful criticism of this work and sage advice has made this endeavor an enjoyable one. Special notice goes to James Quinn, Sally Utech, Karen Beth Zacharias, Kim Schutte, Karl Rubis, and Kyle Anthony. Other colleagues—including Jeremy Prichard, Nicole Anslover, Lena Withers, Amanda Schlumpberger, Stephanie Russell, Tai Edwards, and Jeremy Antley—lent their ears and advice as well. I had not expected to make such good friends at KU, and without them my life would be less full.

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Last—but certainly not least—I am indebted to my family for their love and support. They stuck with me and followed the development of this project intently over the past years. This culmination of my graduate work would not have been possible without their strong commitment to instilling in me a love of reading and the life of the mind.

*To my mother,
who taught me how to read*

&

*To my dad,
who taught me how to write*

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Abbreviations

JCHS	Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Missouri
KCKPL	Kansas City (Kansas) Public Library, Kansas City, Kansas
KSHS	Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas
MGC	Midwest Genealogy Center, Independence, Missouri
SHSM	State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri
SRL	Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Lawrence, Kansas
WHMC—C	Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia Branch
WHMC—KC	Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Kansas City Branch

INTRODUCTION

In the later years of the nineteenth century, as Kansas “old timers” who had experienced the strife of Bleeding Kansas began to pass away, a dedicated librarian at the Kansas State Historical Society undertook a letter-writing campaign to collect information about the slaves who had lived in eastern Kansas in those tumultuous days before Kansas statehood and the Civil War. Abzuga Adams, known simply as Zu, was the daughter of Franklin G. Adams, the first secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, which had been founded in 1875. This woman, who at one time described herself as a “cataloguing machine,” meticulously collected all the responses she received and kept careful records of any slaves and slaveholders whose names appeared within these letters in order to prepare a brief speech on slavery in Kansas.¹ She concluded her speech with these words: “Altho the information obtained is in most instances meager, it will serve as a nucleus around which may be gathered by further effort, the whole number.”² While her intent was not to present the African American perspective, and she concludes that slavery in the territory was a benign

¹ Zu Adams diary entry, June 30, 1892, in Zu Adams Papers, Diary No. 2, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas (hereafter KSHS). Throughout this dissertation I use the terms “slaves” and “enslaved” interchangeably, and on occasion the term “bondpeople” will also appear within these pages. The advantage of using the term “enslaved” is that, as Daina Ramey Berry maintained recently, “it forces us to consider that bondpeople did not let anyone ‘own’ them. They were enslaved against their will” (Daina Ramey Berry, “*Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe*”: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia. [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007], 167, note 4). While this distinction does reinforce the concept of agency, my preference is to use the term “slave” as well, not only because that is the precise descriptor used within historical sources, but also because it can help vary the vocabulary and prevent awkward sentence constructions. I also use the terms “African American” and “black” interchangeably.

² Zu Adams, “Slaves in Kansas,” September 28, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

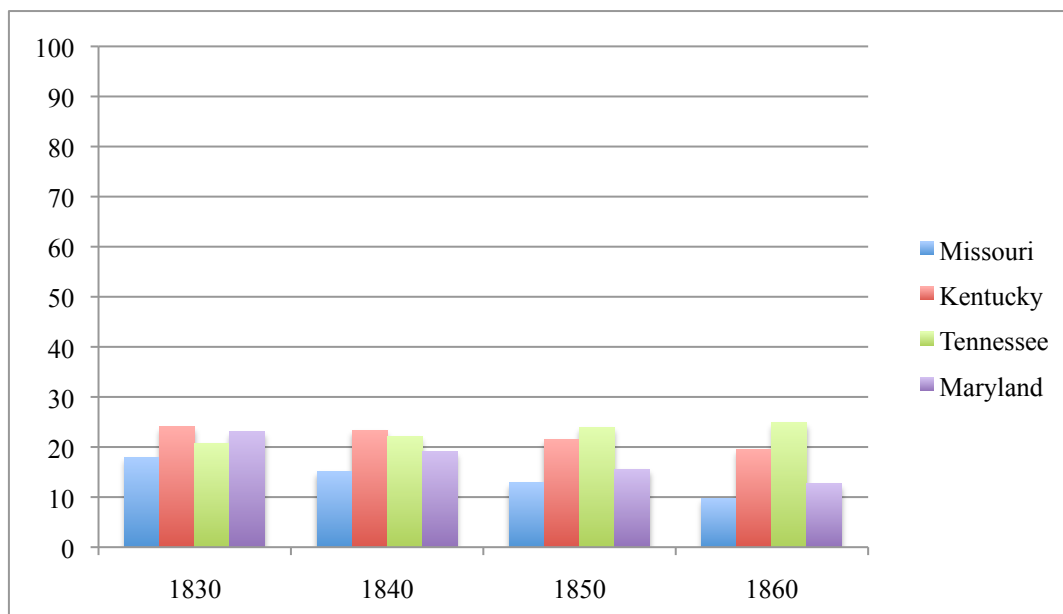
institution, thanks to her dedication and skill at record keeping these reminiscences of “slavery days” have been preserved for future generations.

However, both in popular culture and among academic historians who study the peculiar institution, knowledge of slavery’s existence in territorial Kansas in many ways passed away with the demise of Kansas’ charter generation. No one would deny that Kansas, and the neighboring state of Missouri, played a central role in the rhetorical debate over slavery’s expansion, but for the most part the story of slavery as an institution present on the Kansas-Missouri border has received little attention from scholars. This dissertation will resume the work that Zu Adams began by chronicling the rise and fall of the slave system in this frontier region from the earliest years of white settlement in the 1820s to the end of the Civil War. More specifically, this work analyzes the Kansas-Missouri border region—a unique site of conflict and turmoil over the extension of slavery—as a microcosm of how slavery in the American West both resembled and differed from the established institution associated with the “South.”³

³ I adopt Christopher Phillips’ definition of “Southernness”; namely, that the South was defined by its strong religious and conservative roots, white cultural homogeneity, humid climate, reliance on cash crops cultivated with slave labor, a predominantly agrarian population, and the presence of large African American communities (Christopher Phillips, “‘The Crime Against Missouri’: Slavery, Kansas, and the Cant of Southernness in the Border West” *Civil War History* 48, no. 1 [March 2002], 61). Although, as Phillips correctly points out, Missouri cannot be neatly categorized as Southern since it was also a Western state. For the purposes of this work, I use the terms “West” and “Western” in reference to geographic locations west of the Mississippi River, although with increased settlement in the 1850s and 1860s the boundary between East and West likely shifted further toward what is now the Kansas-Missouri border. See Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 10-11, for a discussion of these changing definitions. The West, for antebellum whites at least, was also a state of mind. It was believed to be a place of promise, increased economic opportunities, self-government, open wilderness and cheap land. Of course, for native peoples and African Americans the West held altogether different meanings.

In most respects, the slaveholding communities that existed along this line shared striking similarities with the slave institution in other states of the Upper South—specifically Kentucky, Tennessee, and Maryland—in addition to having slave populations of comparable size.⁴ Yet, residents of this region also believed that

Figure 1: Slave Population as Percentage of Total Population in Upper South States, 1830-1860



U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Censuses of the United States, 1830-1860 Population Schedules and Slave Schedules* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1831-1864).

this border existed as its own, intact zone exhibiting a natural commonality in terms of heritage, social customs, climate, and geography. The distinctiveness of this social and political terrain was predicated on commonly accepted differences between the

⁴ These three states, in addition to Missouri, form the core of Upper South states as defined in this study. For comparison, the slave populations of Deep South states in 1850 were all over 40 percent: Georgia (42.12 percent), Alabama (44.43 percent), Louisiana (47.28 percent), Mississippi (51.09 percent), and South Carolina (57.59 percent). See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Slave Schedules* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853).

North and the South, essentially defining the border identity in terms of otherness. What set this region apart was the fact that, in the years before the Civil War, this region was still evolving from a frontier society into a growing center of regional development, a place created by Northern, Southern, and western influences. This frontier was a geographic place where native, white, and African-American cultures converged and people of differing lifeways (including Northerners and Southerners) struggled to adapt to the hardships of life on the periphery of American settlement.⁵ Progress was the leitmotif that bound white Americans, of all stripes, to the West.⁶ The border region, then, offers an excellent window into how small-scale enterprises and regional differences, including this frontier influence, affected the contours of slavery.⁷

⁵ This definition of “frontier” is used throughout the dissertation and is based on Stephen Aron’s determination that the most basic definition of a frontier is “a meeting point *between peoples of differing ways and from distinct polities*” (Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006], xvi). Adopting a slightly different characterization, Aron’s article with Jeremy Adelman defines the frontier as “a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined” (815). Their definition of the terms “frontier” and “borderland,” however, is predicated on the involvement (or lack thereof) of more than one colonial European power or native tribe. In the case of the Kansas-Missouri line, the only white power was the United States (aside from a few French entrepreneurs). Thus, I have chosen to use the definition laid out in *American Confluence*. See Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999): 814-841.

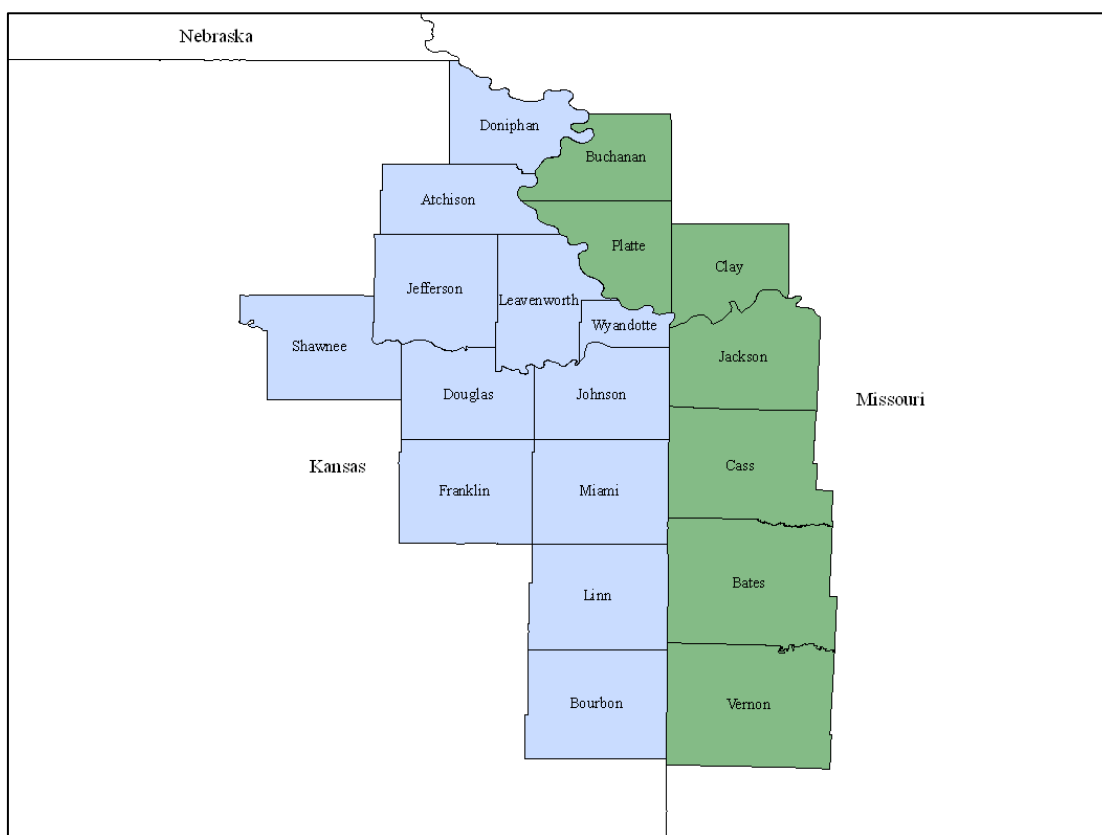
⁶ Although Alexis de Tocqueville and other outside observers of Southern life declared that slavery and the democratic progress were contradictory, Southerners had a different definition of progress than their Northern (or European) counterparts. As Christopher Phillips convincingly argues, “millions of Westerners most decidedly did not reject slavery as incongruent with democratic ascendance. Rather, they embraced the institution as perfectly consistent with the egalitarian social progress they associated implicitly with the promise of Western expansion” (Phillips, 63).

⁷ The history of slavery on large plantations—such as those in the Deep South states of Mississippi and Georgia—provides only a limited glimpse of the slave experience. Since most enslaved individuals and their owners in the Upper South (including states that bordered the North) lived on smaller farms, not plantations, making comparisons between the border and Deep South states (like Mississippi, Alabama, or South Carolina) is an unevenly matched assessment. The precise nature of small-scale slaveholding receives attention in the body of the dissertation.

Geographic Focus

To that end, this dissertation focuses on the western Missouri counties of Buchanan, Platte, Clay, Jackson, Cass, Bates, and Vernon, and the Kansas counties of Doniphan, Atchison, Leavenworth, Jefferson, Shawnee, Douglas, Johnson, Franklin, Miami, Linn, and Bourbon (see map below). These were the most populated counties along the Kansas-Missouri line and thus provide the clearest focus. Although the pattern of slaveholding was not consistent throughout these

Figure 2: Kansas and Missouri Counties Included in This Study



counties—the slave population in Missouri was significantly larger than that in Kansas when comparing raw values—these variations embody the complexities of frontier slavery and do not disqualify the importance of understanding this story.

At first glance the aggregate census data describing the slave population on the border, especially if compared to that of other Southern states, implies that the slave system was a minor element of the frontier settlement process and that slaves and slaveowners comprised an insignificant and un-influential segment of border society. For instance, the total number of slaves in these seven Missouri border counties in 1850—four years before the formation of Kansas Territory—was approximately 10,030.⁸ Kansas Territory's first official census, taken in February 1855, stated that there were 193 slaves in the territory, although Kansas old timers would later recall that the correct number was far higher. The official tally in Kansas fell to two in 1860, while in that same year the Missouri border counties boasted a total of 14,311.⁹ These figures, though useful for limited statistical analysis, mask the true character of slavery and its role in the frontier society that flourished on the Kansas-Missouri line. While the slave system remained small in terms of numbers, this border was an intersection and the site of a blending of native, African American, and white culture, and a convergence point between Northern emigrants and Southern slaveholders.

⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States*, 1850, Slave Schedules (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853). In terms of comparison, see Table 1 and the corresponding footnote.

⁹ C. E. Cory, "Slavery in Kansas" *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, 1901-1902, 7 (Topeka: W. Y. Morgan, 1902), 235. In 1860 the free black population in Kansas was 625, so the total African American population in the territory was 627. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860, Population Schedules (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864).

Argument

This dissertation argues that, contrary to what one may assume on the basis of these census figures, in certain key ways the slave system was central to the establishment of these border counties and their evolution into a mature society. In fact, a high proportion of the leading men in each of these Kansas and Missouri counties—those who served as legislative representatives, ministers, marshals, or judges—were slaveholders. These well-placed individuals strove to perpetuate the slave system even in the midst of the growing conflict over slavery’s continued existence. Although they did not articulate their intentions in such precise terms, these slaveowners worked to transform a *society with slaves* into a *slave society* (with varying success). According to Ira Berlin, in a society with slaves, “slaves were marginal to the central productive processes; slavery was just one form of labor among many.... In slave societies, by contrast, slavery stood at the center of economic production.”¹⁰ Even though *Many Thousands Gone* covers an earlier period and a different geographic area, both Berlin’s work and the story of slavery on the border have an important commonality: each addresses slavery during its formative years in a very specific region of the United States (what Berlin calls the “charter generation”).¹¹ Like the charter generations that fall under the scope of

¹⁰ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, new ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), 8.

¹¹ Berlin focuses on four regions: the North, the Chesapeake, the low country on the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, and the lower Mississippi Valley. See Berlin, 7, 12. While Southern slave society had been well-developed prior to Missouri’s settlement by slaves and slaveholders, and as a result it might not appear to fit Berlin’s definition of a charter generation, Missouri’s status as a new state (and a relatively sparsely settled one at that)—plus the new designations of Indian Territory, Kansas Territory, and the state of Kansas—in many ways paralleled the establishment of slavery in the four regions that Berlin addresses. It is true that many slaveholding settlers on the border came from states where slavery was well established, states like Virginia and Tennessee, but then, many of the

Berlin's study, the first decades of white settlement on the border were characterized by slaveholders' persistent and tenacious commitment to instituting a system of control that would reinforce white superiority and establish hegemonic rule over the enslaved population (an attempt that slaves constantly thwarted in the continued struggle for power).¹²

Furthermore, a social geography of labor illustrates how slavery in this region exhibited a tension wherein slaves and slaveowners struggled for control over movement and space. Slaveholders did maintain tight bonds with their slaves due to the nature of small-scale slaveholding, a relationship which could foster trust, but yet these same slaveholders felt threatened by the proximity of free states. As Barbara Jean Fields concluded in her study of Maryland, another Upper South state with a similar heritage to that of the border region, "the middle ground imparted an extra measure of bitterness to enslavement, set close boundaries on the liberty of the ostensibly free, and played havoc with bonds of love, friendship, and family among slaves and between them and free black people."¹³ Slaveholders on the border were even more adamant about perpetuating the system and controlling slave movement because freedom was an immediate possibility. Slave agency, however, dictated that this was more negotiation than the hegemonic function of the slaveholding society, law, and government; these enslaved men and women constantly resisted enslavement in a variety of ways.

first slaveholders in South Carolina, as one example, had previous experiences with slavery in Barbados. Consequently, prior experience with a slaveholding system should not preclude using the term "charter generation" for the "first waves" of white settlement.

¹² Berlin, 9.

¹³ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 24.

Ultimately, the slave system on the border functioned in much the same way that slavery functioned elsewhere in the Upper South. Slavery's continued existence was predicated on whites' paternalistic notions of racial hierarchy and their use of political, legal, and social channels as tools for strengthening the slave system and maintaining control over the black population. Slave hiring, diverse employment outside of agricultural pursuits, and the predominance of small-scale slaveholding were increasingly common on the border and elsewhere in the Upper South. Of course, the nature of small-scale slaveholding itself dictated that slaveholders who embraced these assumptions were imposing their ideal system onto a much smaller institution.

While "Bound Together" might be categorized as a social history of the African-American community and a labor history of the slave system, it also has a place within the scholarly discussion about the sectional conflict that preceded and continued into the Civil War period. This conflict captured the imagination of the nineteenth-century public. A brief perusal of editorials and articles in national newspapers like *Harper's Weekly* and the *New York Tribune* quickly demonstrates the country's awareness of Western politics. The heated conversations that were central to American identity formation in the early and mid-nineteenth century all had their place in the West: Manifest Destiny, slavery's expansion, the rise of democracy, and paternalistic government policies that displaced the Native American cultures who had inhabited the continent for thousands of years. Thus, since nineteenth-century contemporaries elsewhere in the United States appropriately recognized the significance of the unfolding state of affairs in Missouri and Kansas, a thorough

understanding of slavery's development in this region is central to a broader understanding of American discourse on the slavery question.¹⁴ In fact, analyzing the contours of the slave system actually reinforces the importance of political debates over slavery's expansion, because Bleeding Kansas exposed the fundamental inconsistencies in the worldviews of Northerners and Southerners. As Nicole Etcheson writes, "free staters envisioned a republic of white men; proslavery men, a republic of slaveowners."¹⁵ The situation on the border becomes even more nuanced when the black experience is woven into the historical tapestry. The driving point behind this dissertation is simply that slaves were not marginal to the story of Bleeding Kansas and the Civil War.

Methodology

Despite all indications that research would yield little evidence of the slaves' perspective, it is possible to recreate the day-to-day surroundings of life as an enslaved person on the border, even if the thoughts, feelings, and worldview of those slaves often remain hidden in shadow. Sources that directly provide the perspective of enslaved individuals are an extremely rare but immensely valuable find. Unfortunately in many cases, information about the black experience must be gleaned from sources created by white slaveholders or whites who witnessed slavery in action. These sources include correspondence, maps, private journals, newspapers,

¹⁴ As Jeremy Neely writes, "by the end of the border war, the Kansas-Missouri line was the most pronounced political, ideological, and cultural divide in the entire nation." See Jeremy Neely, *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 3-4.

¹⁵ Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 5.

clippings volumes, wills, tax lists, court records (civil, criminal, and probate), land deeds, advertisements, and bills of sale. Most sources that slaves directly created or dictated—such as reminiscences and WPA interviews recorded during the 1930s—have been filtered through a white lens. This has posed another challenge. In all cases I have approached these sources with a cautious, critical eye and examined them within the context of the secondary literature and slave reminiscences from those who were enslaved outside of the border region (of which there are many).¹⁶ Whenever possible, I have verified the information found therein and cross-referenced it with public records such as census data. White rhetoric may have shaped the available source material, and consequently our interpretations of slavery, but slaves' voices can still be heard through these threadbare and fragile ties to the antebellum period.

This focus on relatively unknown individuals is one reason why this dissertation has some elements in common with microhistory. As Jill Lepore has so aptly stated, microhistorians “tend to betray people who have left abundant records in order to resurrect those who did not.”¹⁷ In this case, there were no abundant records to renounce, but the intent remains the same. Microhistorians concern themselves with individuals' stories, much like traditional biographers. But, practitioners of microhistory believe that “however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that

¹⁶ Examining slave narratives for the entire state of Missouri (and also other states) has allowed me to make informed guesses about the possible thoughts, feelings, and responses of those who *were* enslaved on the border.

¹⁷ Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography” *The Journal of American History* 88 (June 2001), 141.

individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole."¹⁸ Understanding the place of individuals and their movement throughout the border region is therefore essential to any social geography of the Kansas-Missouri line.

The theoretical work of historical geographer Allan Pred also informs my methodology. Pred has argued that "place is therefore a process whereby the reproduction of social and cultural forms, the formation of biographies, and the transformation of nature ceaselessly become one another at the same time that time-space specific activities and power relations ceaselessly become one another."¹⁹ In the context of this dissertation, slaveholders strove to reproduce the "social and cultural forms" of slavery. According to his article titled "Place as Historically Contingent Process," individuals in his paradigm have trod two paths: their life path and the daily path. Taken within the context of slavery on the Kansas-Missouri line, these "participants"—namely, African-American slaves—made daily choices and worked within the constraints of a coercive labor system. Each of their passages on the life path and daily path have left an imprint on the social geography of the border region.

Historiography

My work builds upon, and sometimes departs from, the established historical literature on slavery and the West. The classic, comprehensive monographs that

¹⁸ Lepore, 133.

¹⁹ Allan Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74, no. 2 (June 1984), 282.

discuss slavery on the national level—books by esteemed historians like Herbert Gutman, Ira Berlin, and Jacqueline Jones—are virtually silent on the matter of Western slavery, focusing instead on the Southern states more frequently associated with slave labor.²⁰ The plantation system that thrived in these states with large slave populations often required a virtual army of artisans (blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and the like), domestic staff, and other skilled workers who harvested and processed the crops. Small-scale slaveholding existed, to be sure, but it was not the prominent (nor dominant) form of labor organization. Since the majority of Southern slaves worked in either an agricultural or domestic context, with only a minority laboring in industrial areas, the first serious scholars to examine the slave system began their work by studying plantation culture. In recent years some historians, like Dylan Penningroth, Stephanie M. H. Camp, and Anthony Kaye, have begun to approach slavery's history as a story of active African American communities that served as sites of both resistance and acculturation, of negotiation and not of hegemony.²¹ These new works have challenged the traditional historical framework that privileges large plantations, but these works do not address the slave system in Kansas or in Missouri where, as Diane Mutti Burke demonstrates, small-scale slaveholding was

²⁰ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, new ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

²¹ Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). These are only a sampling of the excellent work published in the last ten years, and these scholars built upon the work of influential historians like Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Deborah Gray White, and others.

the dominant form of enslaved labor.²² Each of these monographs can concretely ground any regional analysis of the slave system by contributing valuable methodological tools, but in most respects such comprehensive studies gloss over the story of small-scale slaveholding, especially as it appeared in frontier regions.

Those historians who do research the African American experience in the trans-Mississippi West do little better when it comes to understanding whether or not slavery existed on the Kansas-Missouri border and how it manifested itself on the frontier. Quintard Taylor's *In Search of the Racial Frontier* deals with slavery in Indian Territory, but he only focuses on the Five Civilized Tribes who lived in what is now Oklahoma (from 1830 to 1854 Kansas was the northern portion of Indian Territory).²³ William Loren Katz's *The Black West* includes a chapter titled "Slavery on the Frontier," and while this chapter includes some detail on the Ohio River Valley that lies well to the east of the Great Plains, Katz ignores both Kansas and Missouri in favor of sections on Oregon, Utah, and Texas.²⁴ His next chapter on the sectional crisis briefly addresses the controversy over slavery's expansion into Kansas but, with the exception of two brief primary sources, he does not provide any concrete information about how slavery functioned during the Bleeding Kansas crisis.²⁵ These

²² Diane Mutti Burke, "On Slavery's Borders: Slavery and Slaveholding on Missouri's Farms, 1821-1865" (Ph.D. diss, Emory University, 2004).

²³ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998). He confines his study to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma and does not even mention that slavery also existed further north.

²⁴ William Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States*, rev. ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 2005). In Katz's work, the only mention of Missouri slavery in this chapter (Kansas is not addressed at all) is a half paragraph about St. Louis. See p. 72.

²⁵ Katz, 98-99. Here Katz refers to John Brown's work liberating slaves and to a reminiscence of a slave sale that took place in Iowa Point, Kansas Territory. These sources are used anecdotally,

works make clear that African Americans were an important presence in the West, but by building on these works this dissertation will add the story of slavery to this larger narrative.

Because this border was a site of cultural exchange among Southerners, Northerners, foreign nationals, and native peoples, this dissertation also fits within the broader historiography of the earliest white settlements in the Missouri River basin and the outlying areas. Prior to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 western Missouri lay beside the northern portion of Indian Territory, and Missouri itself was not even a state until 1821. William E. Foley's *The Genesis of Missouri* includes excellent details about the social development and settlement of the state, although his analysis therein is confined primarily to central and eastern Missouri centers like St. Louis.²⁶ Stephen Aron's *American Confluence* argues that in the Mississippi River Valley, as with other confluence regions like the Missouri River basin, the "creative adaptations and constructive accommodations" of the settlement process profoundly influenced developing conflicts but also encouraged cooperation.²⁷ Aron's work in particular inspired me to think more creatively about the various groups moving into the border region and their ability to shape new identities based on various cultural influences.

Yet, even with this thoughtful scholarship of white emigration into the West, the absence of any detailed study of slavery on the Kansas-Missouri border limits historians' ability to fully understand the complexities of this region. Indeed, as

however, and in general his book fails to demonstrate that slavery in Kansas and Missouri was a visible feature of the frontier society.

²⁶ William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989).

²⁷ Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), xviii.

historian Gunja Sen Gupta has noted, “the invisibility of African Americans as anything other than objects of white discourse represents perhaps the most serious weakness in the existing state of Bleeding Kansas historiography.”²⁸ The earliest studies of the slave system in territorial Kansas, such as Zu Adams’ research during the 1880s and 1890s, had only managed to preserve basic facts about Kansas slavery and demonstrate its presence in the broader narrative. Similarly one of Adams’ contemporaries, a historian named C. E. Cory, published a detailed enumeration of slaveholders in 1902 that provides a thorough foundation of statistical data.²⁹

In recent years, however, historians of this region have begun to chip away at this monumental task by examining the racial environment on the border and considering the African American perspective. A scholarly article that more thoroughly examines slavery on the western border of Missouri and Indian Territory in this early period is Kevin Abing’s “Before Bleeding Kansas: Christian Missionaries, Slavery, and the Shawnee Indians in Pre-Territorial Kansas, 1844-1854.” Abing discusses both native slaveholders and missionaries like Thomas Johnson, who were vocal in their support of slaveholding. Most importantly, his work takes slavery’s history out of the context of westward expansion and reorients it as a system that split the Methodist church into Northern and Southern factions and further exacerbated interdenominational tensions.³⁰ His portrayal of slaveholders as

²⁸ Gunja SenGupta, “Bleeding Kansas: A Review Essay,” *Kansas History* 24 (Winter 2001-2002), 340.

²⁹ Adams’ research notes can be found both in her personal papers and the Slaves and Slavery Collection at the Kansas State Historical Society. Cory’s article was published; see Charles E. Cory, “Slavery in Kansas,” *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1901-1902* 7 (Topeka: W. Y. Morgan, 1902): 229-242.

³⁰ Kevin Abing, “Before Bleeding Kansas: Christian Missionaries, Slavery, and the Shawnee Indians in Pre-Territorial Kansas, 1844-1854,” *Kansas History* 24 (Spring 2001), 56. Another study of the

diedhard advocates, even when they would not describe themselves in such terms, reinforced my own conviction that slaveholders actively worked to ensure they would have access to slave property.

Perhaps the most well known recent monograph on Kansas Territory comes from Nicole Etcheson, whose book *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* examines territorial politics, arguing that both pro-slavery and free-state forces were driven by their motivation to preserve their own white liberties. Etcheson's conclusions about free labor built upon those of James Rawley, whose 1980 book *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* contends that the controversy over slavery was the result of whites' fears about the influx of free black laborers who would compete with white labor.³¹ These both continue the historiographical trend of recent decades centered on understanding the political context and ideological origins of the Bleeding Kansas crisis.³² By understanding the political repercussions of slavery's expansion, particularly in the eyes of Northerners, historians can better contextualize Southerners' influence in the

religious environment in Kansas is Gunja SenGupta's *For God and Mammon*, which focuses on how the coalition between evangelicals and entrepreneurs in Kansas encouraged wider support of antislavery politics in the territory. See Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

³¹ Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

³² Etcheson built upon an early work on the region, Eugene Berwanger's *Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy*, which examined the free-state movement's treatment of slaves and free blacks. Berwanger argued that their racist attitudes stemmed from their devotion to free labor, as well as the fact that many white emigrants brought prejudices that were prevalent in their home states. See Eugene Berwanger, *Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy*, new ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), which was first published in 1967.

territory and the conflicts that arose between neighbors over the question of slavery's continued existence.

Two very recent monographs have continued this interest in the border region. Jeremy Neely's *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* stretches into the post-Civil War period to examine how Missourians and Kansans overcame border rivalries and developed similar views on the defining movements of the late nineteenth century such as industrialization and railroad expansion. His conclusion regarding slaveholding, however, insists that "the ownership of African American slaves held only a marginal presence in this frontier society."³³ For the southern counties along the border—which form the core of his study—this conclusion is accurate, but such statements can potentially obscure the importance of understanding slavery elsewhere along the line (in counties that had higher populations of both whites and blacks). Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel's *Bleeding Borders: Race, Gender, and Violence in Pre-Civil War Kansas* incorporates race into the Bleeding Kansas narrative by asserting that "Indians, blacks, and women shaped the political and cultural terrain in ways that discouraged the extension of slavery but failed to challenge a racial hierarchy that relegated all people of color to inferior status."³⁴ Her analysis of settlers' racial and gender ideologies is the most thorough to date. These works all provide valuable glimpses of the black experience in Kansas, building the foundation for a more systematic analysis of the slave system as it existed on the Kansas-Missouri border.

³³ Jeremy Neely, *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 23.

³⁴ Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel, *Bleeding Borders: Race, Gender, and Violence in Pre-Civil War Kansas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 3.

Missouri's larger slave population has inspired some very thorough studies of slavery in the most populated areas of central Missouri, and these works can inform our understanding of the system on the western border. R. Douglas Hurt's book *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* locates Missouri slavery within the history of slavery more generally, comparing its agricultural and labor systems to those of other Upper South states such as Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. It was emigrants from these states who settled Missouri, and "these settlers brought their Southern culture with them, particularly the acceptance of slavery."³⁵ Another pertinent study of Missouri slavery is Diane Mutti Burke's dissertation, "On Slavery's Borders: Slavery and Slaveholding on Missouri's Farms, 1821-1865," which argues that small-scale slaveholding, in contrast to the large plantation systems of the Deep South, took root in Missouri and fostered an intimate relationship between slaves and slaveowners based on close physical proximity. Both of these have thoughtfully considered the importance of the peculiar institution within the state's history.

Although the historiography of the Civil War is far too vast to detail here, the discourse that shapes our understanding of this conflict often ignores or trivializes the story of the western theater, doing little better when it comes to analyzing the African American experience in border states such as Missouri. Two works that consider the importance of this border narrative—Michael Fellman's *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War* and Jay Monaghan's *Civil War on the Western Border*—enrich our understanding of the larger conflict by paying

³⁵ R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 6.

special attention to the unique position of Missouri, a slave state that did not secede from the Union and that possessed an official state government and also a shadow Confederate government.³⁶ While each of these is an immensely useful contribution to our comprehension of how proponents of disunion clashed verbally and physically with citizens who maintained their allegiance to federal authorities, the voices of African Americans do not appear with any regularity in either of these monographs. I would argue that understanding slavery on the border is crucial to historians' analysis of emancipation during the intense guerrilla conflict that consumed Missouri during the war years.

Scholarly research on the African American experience in the war years at times recognizes the role that Kansas (and to some extent Missouri) played in the shaping of contraband policy and slaves' decisions to flee, thus demonstrating the importance of emancipation to the war's outcome (both literally and figuratively). Richard Sheridan's excellent article on the Underground Railroad and contrabands effectively highlights the movement that brought enslaved men and women into Kansas and their ability to create a new life for themselves after emancipation.³⁷ Dudley Cornish's *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* maintains that by 1864 there had been a revolution that "involved a broadening of the war aims of the Lincoln administration from preservation of the Union to abolition of human slavery. It involved also the gradual recognition of the Negro's right to fight

³⁶ Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Jay Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border, 1854-1865* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

³⁷ Richard B. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contraband into Kansas, 1854-1865," *Kansas History* 12 (Spring 1989): 28-47.

for those war aims, of his ability to perform as a soldier—recognition, in short, of the Negro's manhood.”³⁸ Cornish’s contribution lies largely in his ability to incorporate discussion of black troops in the western theater into the larger discourse of race and emancipation during the war. In contrast esteemed historian James McPherson’s *The Negro’s Civil War*, while a masterful narrative of how blacks perceived and participated in the conflict, does not acknowledge that James Lane’s use of black troops in 1862 pre-dated the official mustering of the more well-known USCT regiments such as the Louisiana Native Guards and the 54th Massachusetts.³⁹ As a response to such omissions, this dissertation places the experiences of African Americans front and center within the narrative of the warfare that plagued the Kansas-Missouri line.

My project contextualizes the larger sectional debate (which is capably presented in the work of these scholars) by giving a voice to pro-slavery men and women, and more importantly, to their slaves. Slaves’ close proximity to freedom (which was sometimes as near as the neighboring farm) makes this region an excellent case study for how the slave system functioned outside of the Deep South. Consequently, this dissertation departs from the traditional trajectory of political developments taking place within the years 1825 to 1865, preferring instead to offer a social and cultural portrait of slavery within eastern Kansas and western Missouri.

³⁸ Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865*, rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), xii. See also Dudley Taylor Cornish, *Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War* (Topeka: Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, 1969).

³⁹ James McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). James Lane receives only one very brief mention, and the 1863 battle at Poison Springs, Arkansas, which occurred at nearly the same time as the 54th Massachusetts’ assault on Fort Wagner is not even referred to in passing.

This work can correct significant lapses in the historical narrative of Bleeding Kansas, slavery, and race relations in the American West. None of these black men, women, and children are well known today, and most lived a life of obscurity in their own time. Yet, their stories exemplify the complexities of the frontier experience and contextualize our modern interpretations of daily life on the border.

Chapter Outline

The chapters that follow portray how slavery functioned at a cultural crossroads and scrutinize historians' previously held assumptions about the African American experience on the Kansas-Missouri line. Chapter 1, **“Westward Ho!: Southern Settlement on the Frontier, 1825-1845,”** traces American settlement on the border and the founding of early counties in Missouri. In addition to settlement by white slaveowners and enslaved blacks, some native tribes who relocated to Indian Territory after removal (like the Wyandotte and Shawnee) had a history of slaveholding that extended into their post-removal period. The fledgling communities that sprouted along the border with Indian Territory found their footing thanks to slaveholders who brought their Southern slaveholding culture with them as they emigrated to the frontier.

The second chapter, **“Little Dixie: The Creation of a Western Slave Society, 1840-1854,”** covers the development and solidification of slavery as a central component of government and society on the frontier, beginning in the mid-1840s when these counties saw a sharp increase in emigration. During this period slaveholders sought to perpetuate the slave system, even as slaves strove to resist

planters' control and carve out a limited degree of independence within the peculiar institution. Although small-scale slaveholding was indeed the norm on the border, this chapter will also illustrate the similarities between slavery in this region and slavery in the rest of the South, arguing that historians should expand our definition of "Little Dixie" to include the border region.

The third chapter, **"Contested Ground: The Slave Experience During Bleeding Kansas, 1854-1861,"** describes how slavery functioned during the heated crisis that eventually spawned the Civil War. The doctrine of popular sovereignty turned Kansas Territory into a battleground over the extension of slavery. While the rhetoric of free-soil proponents and pro-slavery supporters dominated the country's perceptions of this contest, the true character of the conflict cannot be understood without a thorough examination of how slavery functioned at the ground level.

Chapter 4, **"Tracing Mobility: The Social Geography of Slavery and Freedom, 1854-1861,"** discusses the three contexts for slaves' movement that served as the most important outlets for slaves' agency. These contexts were: slave hiring, travel for business, and escape on the Underground Railroad. Slaveholders both literally and figuratively reproduced the slave system by regulating slave movements, even as slaves themselves negotiated their own understandings of place.

The fifth and final chapter, **"Entering the Promised Land: The Black Experience in the Civil War Years, 1861-1865,"** brings this story to a close by examining the mass self-emancipation that shaped African American life on the border during this tumultuous conflict. Former slaves made their way to Kansas independently, hurried to safety behind Union lines, and some men enlisted in the

military hoping to bring about the ultimate freedom for their people. Each of these chapters reconsiders historians' present understanding of the slave system by offering new insights into how the peculiar institution took shape on the Kansas-Missouri frontier.

CHAPTER 1

WESTWARD HO!: SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT ON THE FRONTIER, 1825-1845

Samuel Ralston, a slaveholder from North Carolina who had just recently settled in Independence, Missouri, penned a letter to his brother-in-law in April 1843. “Missouri, at this time has more inducements for emigration than any state in the Union,” he wrote. “Her soil [is] well adapted to the cultivation of the best products of the Country, and full of the richest minerals, her climate pure and healthy.”¹ Ralston constantly advertised the great benefits of this western land, urging his family to “become a citizen of this State, and suffer me to request that you will use every exertion in your power to induce our friends in Carolina to do likewise.”² The enslaved adult women on Ralston’s farm—of which there were two in 1850—likely worked as domestic servants while the three enslaved men labored out in the fields, caring for the corn and hemp crops.³ This household was only one of many to settle

¹ W. Darrell Overdyke, “A Southern Family on the Missouri Frontier: Letters from Independence, 1843-1855,” *The Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 2 (May 1951), 218. This letter was addressed to D. W. Jordan, who judging from the context was Sarah Ann (Jordan) Ralston’s brother. Jordan came to visit Independence later that year and agreed that the countryside was “as good as any person could ask it” (Overdyke, 221).

² Overdyke, 218.

³ Several of Ralston’s letters mention the state of his agricultural pursuits, especially Overdyke 219, 223. According to the 1850 slave schedule, there were two men aged twenty six, one man aged twenty, one woman aged twenty, one woman aged nineteen, one boy aged twelve, one girl aged eleven, plus a three-year-old boy and a female baby (four months old). See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Slave Schedules* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853). It is unclear how soon the children were put to labor, but most likely the eleven-year old girl helped around the household, while the toddler and baby did not, for obvious reasons.

in western Missouri.⁴ John Mason Peck, a Baptist minister who traveled throughout the Missouri River valley, observed that the majority of these emigrants came from the Upper South; as he wrote in his journal, “it seemed as though Kentucky and Tennessee were breaking up and moving to the ‘Far West.’”⁵

Slaveholders’ westward emigration, like that of their non-slaveholding Southern and Northern counterparts, was motivated in large part by their desires for greater economic opportunities. Indeed, as historian James Oakes observed, “what united small slaveholders with the sons of planters was the goal of purchasing land and slaves and moving west in pursuit of that goal.”⁶ Slaveholders in both the Upper and Lower South looked westward, and as they transplanted the slave system into previously unknown territory, they continually perpetuated and reinforced the hierarchical social assumptions that were inherent in the slaveholding culture from whence they came. Many enslaved individuals, who very often had no say in the matter, relocated alongside the white members of the household and carried with them their own cultural mores and expectations. As historian Philip Scarpino has noted, “it must be argued that slaveholders cannot be isolated from the general

⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “household” in reference to both the free and enslaved individuals who lived on the farm or plantation, since the fortunes of these men and women were inextricably bound together. This is in accordance with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s description of the household as “a basic social unit in which people, whether voluntarily or under compulsion, pool their income and resources” (Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988], 31). See also Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

⁵ John Mason Peck, *Forty Years of Pioneer Life*, ed. Rufus Babcock (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 202, 146. This entry was apparently written in 1824, although the editorial comments interspersed throughout sometimes interrupt the flow of Peck’s narrative.

⁶ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 76. Oakes’ work contributed significantly to our understanding of slavery by illustrating the diversity within the slaveholding class and how there were far-reaching variations separating large-scale plantation owners from small-scale yeoman farmers (Oakes, xv-xvi).

context of antebellum westward movement. The constant lure of cheap fertile land served as a powerful incentive for the entire nineteenth-century agricultural migration.”⁷ Most white Southerners did not give a second (or even first) thought to whether or not they would bring their slaves out to the frontier. The entire household would necessarily relocate since the fortunes of the black and white members were inextricably linked and, in the eyes of whites, that human property was essential to the success of their new ventures in the West. The establishment of a distinct Old South slaveholding culture among grounded elites may have encouraged putting down roots, but the narrative of Southern slaveholding was also defined by a constant push westward as slaveholding agriculturalists sought untainted land that held the promise of a bountiful harvest. This geographic mobility and the westward expansion of Southern slaveholding culture were central to the settlement of the Kansas-Missouri line.

To that end, this chapter will address slaves’ and slaveholders’ early emigration to the border region, which at this time consisted of western Missouri and northern Indian Territory (which would become Kansas Territory in 1854).⁸ Most of these emigrants hailed from Upper South states such as Kentucky and Tennessee, making the border region an extension of the slaveholding culture that existed in

⁷ Philip V. Scarpino, “Slavery in Callaway County, Missouri: 1845-1855, Pt. II” *Missouri Historical Review* 71 (April 1977), 282. Scarpino’s interpretation meshes nicely with James Oakes’ conclusion that “by the nineteenth century, westward migration had become so much a part of upward mobility in the South that it took on a lure almost independent of the profitable potential of the actual move” (Oakes, 76).

⁸ The southern portion of Indian Territory became present-day Oklahoma.

more established portions of the Upper South.⁹ Our story begins in 1825, when the few hardy individuals who already lived on the border witnessed increased numbers of slaveholding families bringing slaves into the fledgling society taking root on the frontier.

Examination of the existing evidence produced during this early period—such as census records, reminiscences, correspondence, and journals—leads to two conclusions regarding the influx of Southern slaveholders into the border region.¹⁰ First, the founding fathers of western Missouri counties, and the leading governmental, cultural, and religious figures in neighboring Indian Territory, were slaveholders. There were non-slaveholders in their midst, to be sure, but overwhelmingly these emigrants were Southerners who actively worked to establish slavery along the border, wielding a great deal of power over the local economy and government. The majority of these slaveholding emigrants came from the middling sort who had not owned expansive plantation complexes devoted to the production of cash crops like cotton. These slaveowners practiced diversified agriculture and used their produce for personal use and for sale.¹¹ However, while their slaveholdings may have been small, these slaveholders occupied an elite status simply because their

⁹ For instance, H. Jason Combs' work on the Platte Purchase—which made up the six counties in the extreme northwest corner of Missouri—argues that of these counties, Platte and Buchanan (which are included in the scope of this dissertation) “had the highest percentages of upper Southern settlers, 65% and 51% respectively” (H. Jason Combs, “The South’s Slave Culture Transplanted to the Western Frontier,” *The Professional Geographer* 56, no. 3 [2004], 365).

¹⁰ The vast majority of those sources come from the white American perspective, the only exception being a reminiscence left by a former slave named Anne Shatteo who told her story to a newspaper reporter sometime in 1875. See “Aunt Ann’s Story: More than Thirty Years in Kansas,” *Kansas Daily Commonwealth*, May 12, 1875, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter KSHS).

¹¹ Diane Mutti Burke, “On Slavery’s Borders: Slavery and Slaveholding on Missouri’s Farms, 1821-1865” (Ph. D. diss., Emory University, 2004), 29-30.

ability to own and care for slaves illustrated their wealth and set them apart from other settlers who they deemed less fortunate. It was this elite status that allowed slaveholders to gain control of key government, financial, and social positions within the communities that cropped up along the Kansas-Missouri line.

Second, although slaveholders wielded significant cultural and political influence on the border, and from the earliest years of settlement slavery was central to the border economy and social system, border slaveholding was a small-scale system unlike the plantation complex that had developed in the Deep South. This was due to the fact that Indian Territory was not open to white settlement and Americans had only recently settled in western Missouri. In 1830, Indian Territory had been parceled out as a series of tribal reserves that existed at a distance from the rest of American society, with the population of emigrant Indians far outweighing the small white population of trappers, traders, missionaries, and military personnel. Because the government strictly regulated non-native settlement in Indian Territory (although some squatters certainly evaded detection), the number of white immigrants on the western side of the border remained small during the pre-territorial period,¹² confined to Indian missions, trading posts, and the military sites of Fort Leavenworth and Fort Scott. The transient nature of frontier society dictates that no population statistic can be absolutely proven, but according to William Cutler's 1883 history of Kansas, there were approximately 1,400 white inhabitants in northern Indian Territory, including about 700 military men and a comparable number of civilian

¹² This dissertation will use the term "pre-territorial period" to describe the years between 1825 (when the Shawnee tribe settled in what became Kansas) and 1854 when Indian Territory was opened to white settlement. Thus, the "pre-territorial period" deals with the period before Kansas Territory, not the period before Indian Territory.

traders, missionaries, and other attendant personnel.¹³ Nevertheless, within this small population both white slaveholders and their native counterparts were some of the most well-respected, leading influences in the territory, demonstrating not only that slaveholding was present, but also that slaveholders wielded significant power within these fledgling communities. The exact number of slaves and slaveholders living in northern Indian Territory will never be known, but with such a profusion of prominent slaveholders it is clear that in terms of cultural impact, slavery was a very visible part of life on the frontier.

Historical Background

On the border, African Americans' enslavement became part of the discourse only after scattered European and American settlements spread toward the Rockies, since the native tribes indigenous to eastern Kansas and western Missouri—namely the Osage, Kansa, and Pawnee—did not embrace this slavery as part of their social mores.¹⁴ In this early period, from the late 1700s into the turn of the nineteenth century, the Kansas-Missouri line did not yet exist on any European or American map, but the region enjoyed a convergence of waterways that made it a crossroads of native, European, and American cultures. As historian William Foley has noted, “not

¹³ William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, vol. 1 (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 82.

¹⁴ For tribes on the plains, enslavement occurred as the result of raids on neighboring native groups and often those captives would be adopted into Indian households or held for ransom; see Patricia A. Kilroe, “Amerindian Slavery, Plains,” in Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, vol. 1 (New York: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 37. Discussion of native slavery elsewhere in North America can be found in James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2002). Brooks argued that in many cases, women and children were enslaved and then incorporated into their new society, forming a bridge across cultures and adapting to their new, unwelcome circumstances (Brooks, 30).

clearly situated in any of the four national geographic centers and yet a part of all, Missouri and its people personify American pluralism.”¹⁵ In that sense, then, the border region was simultaneously Western, Eastern, and Southern.

The first Europeans to establish a presence on the border were French explorers who traversed the Missouri River in the 1600s, and not long after French fur trappers and traders established posts along both the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. French settlers, such as the prominent Chouteau family headquartered in St. Louis, were the first to bring African slaves into the border region. By the 1760s, the Spanish crown had regained control of the border—which was included in the much larger territory called Louisiana—and encouraged American emigration with cheap land grants and other financial incentives. Many Americans, including large numbers of Southerners, took the Spanish offer to heart, and those who were slaveholders brought their slaves with them.¹⁶

The situation changed with the turn of the nineteenth century. Overwhelmed by debt and the administrative red tape that accompanied any large scale colonial effort, the Spanish quietly transferred Louisiana back into French hands in 1801. After the French lost control of their colony in St. Domingue, which had been overrun by a militant slave uprising, Napoleon offered to sell Louisiana to the United States at a discounted rate. With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, one of the crowning

¹⁵ William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 300. Two of the best works on early Missouri history and emigration, in addition to *The Genesis of Missouri*, are Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) and William E. Foley, *A History of Missouri*, Vol. I, 1673-1820 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Burke, 22-23.

achievements of President Jefferson's tenure in office, the border region settled into white American hands. Americans who had already put down roots along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers grew concerned over the transfer of power, not only because the United States might refuse to recognize their land grants (acquired under the Spanish colonization scheme), but also because slaveholders in Upper Louisiana feared that slavery might be outlawed. Slaveholders who lived north of the New Orleans area noted that, while Congress had allowed slavery's existence in the Territory of Orleans to the south, the U.S. government had not dictated whether or not the peculiar institution would be sanctioned throughout the rest of the territory (what was known as Upper Louisiana).¹⁷ Eventually the United States assuaged these doubts by instituting a slave code that was actually more strict than the laws that had existed under French or Spanish rule. Thus, by 1805 when Upper Louisiana established its own territorial government, slaveholders in what would become Missouri and Kansas had only grown more confident in their right to hold human property.¹⁸

American settlements, however, were congregated along the Mississippi River with only a smattering of houses adjacent to the Missouri River in the center of the state. The border region had remained under native control throughout the political reshuffling that occurred during the Early Republic period and the Jefferson

¹⁷ Foley, *Genesis of Missouri*, 143-144, 151. One of the problems with opening Louisiana to American settlement was that much of the land had already been allotted as Spanish land grants, and those who had lived in the territory while it was under Spanish control wondered if their land grants might be diminished or taken away altogether to allow space for the impending influx of new settlers. The bill that incorporated Louisiana Territory into the United States divided the territory along the thirty-third parallel, with the northern portion called Upper Louisiana (officially the "District of Louisiana") and the southern portion designated the Territory of Orleans. For additional information on this division, see Foley, *Genesis of Missouri*, 134-135, 149.

¹⁸ Burke, 24.

administration. Tensions between American settlers and the native tribes who claimed the border region—primarily the Osage—existed at various points on the Missouri frontier, thanks to increased American emigration and ensuing pressures on the area's natural resources. Osage lands stretched throughout western Missouri and eastern Kansas, and their displeasure with the United States encouraged violent depredations against white settlements. Meriwether Lewis, who was elected territorial governor in 1807, attempted to regain control by giving the Osage an ultimatum: they would stop their attacks on white neighbors, or else lose the U.S. government's protection and access to trade goods.¹⁹ In order to maintain peaceful relations and reinforce American dominance, the U.S. government built Fort Osage, which stands less than fifteen miles from modern-day Independence in Jackson County, Missouri.

This fort, erected in 1808, was the second American fort built within the Louisiana Purchase. The site had been chosen by General William Clark, whose leadership during the Corps of Discovery expedition received widespread acclaim. To keep local tribes in check, federal officials established a government trading factory within the fort, and Clark oversaw the construction of a log palisade, barracks to house a company of soldiers, four blockhouses, a factory store made of two connected cabins, and various other outbuildings. These trade facilities were an incentive for native tribes to resume a congenial relationship with the white leadership of Upper Louisiana, and to facilitate this peaceful accord General Clark

¹⁹ William E. Foley, *A History of Missouri*, Vol. I, 1673-1820 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 128-129.

sent Nathan Boone (Daniel Boone's son) and an interpreter to the Osage villages to arrange for a conference at the new fort.²⁰

Figure 3: Drawing of Fort Osage



Drawing courtesy of Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

During these conversations, Clark discovered that the Osage leaders were eager to demonstrate allegiance to the United States; he capitalized on their agreeable outlook and brokered a treaty where the Osage would relinquish their claim to the land between the Missouri and Arkansas Rivers, which included much of the border region. A faction of the Osage later followed Clark to St. Louis in protest of the treaty's terms, prompting some revisions, but the revised treaty that was signed on August 31, 1809, remained similar to Clark's original text. In return for ceding their land holdings, the Osage would enjoy a permanent government factory (this would sell merchandise and provide services like milling and blacksmithing), annual

²⁰ Foley, *Genesis of Missouri*, 205.

stipends of 1,500 dollars, and renewed protection under the powerful arm of the United States government.²¹ A major amendment, included by Governor Lewis, also called for the Osage to cede land north of the Missouri River (which would include the modern-day Missouri counties of Clay, Platte, Buchanan, and others). For the white settlers who had hoped for opportunities to settle the western Missouri frontier, this monumental treaty was a boon and houses cropped up around the fort. Although Fort Osage was evacuated from 1813 to 1815 as a result of the War of 1812, it remained a central component of American settlement on the border until its abandonment in 1822. In addition to this American influence some French creoles, who had maintained a presence in eastern Missouri and the vicinity of St. Louis, also spread westward into other places within the Missouri River valley.²²

The steady influx of new settlers into Missouri necessarily dictated discussion over when the territory might become eligible for statehood. On January 8, 1818, the Speaker of the House of Representatives presented the first petition for Missouri statehood. The ensuing debate over slavery's extension and Missouri's place in the Union would continue unabated for more than two years. In 1818 there was a balance in Congress between slave states and free states, and Missouri's admission as a slave state would put the South at an advantage, a proposition that struck fear in the hearts of Northerners. After a succession of heated debates, Congress finally approved the passage of the Missouri Compromise, a collection of bills masterminded by statesman Henry Clay that attempted to solve the controversy over slavery's extension to the

²¹ Foley, *History of Missouri*, 131-132.

²² Foley, *History of Missouri*, 131-132, 156.

benefit of both North and South. Southerners would gain Missouri as a slave state, and a new state (Maine) would be created out of Massachusetts's land holdings to enter the Union as a free state, thus preserving the tenuous balance in Congress. Another key stipulation of the Missouri Compromise was that slavery would not be sanctioned in any land acquired during the Louisiana Purchase north of the 36° 30' parallel, with the exception of the new state of Missouri. The compromise's passage ensured that slavery would safely exist in Missouri, and as a result, slaveholders throughout the Upper South continued to emigrate into this new western state, bringing their slave property alongside the white members of the household.²³

Statehood brought further change to the border region. By the early 1820s the countryside circling Fort Osage—known as Six Mile country—was already home to many pioneer families of American or French descent. Among these earliest settlers were enslaved African Americans and African creoles. In fact the Chouteau family, the esteemed French trading dynasty that had ruled Missouri during the late eighteenth century, were among those who brought slaves out to the border region. Although the Chouteaus still exerted a degree of influence on the fur trade through their involvement in the American Fur Company, the majority of pioneers in Six Mile country were American citizens. National and international developments during the antebellum period, including the Panic of 1819 and the Mexican War, temporarily stemmed the tide of emigration, but these were only short-lived setbacks. Missouri's population grew dramatically in the ten years following statehood, rising from a total population of only 66,586 in 1820 to 140,455 individuals in 1830. In that same ten-

²³ Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 19-20.

year period, the black population increased by a ratio of 2.52 percent, while the white population decreased by 2.35 percent.²⁴

Statistical Analysis of Slaveholder Emigration

As stated earlier, western Missouri's slaveholding population came largely from Upper South states like Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. While the border economy was driven by agricultural production, the shorter growing seasons and climate of the state were not suitable for cotton cultivation or other cash crops (like indigo or rice). These were the crops prevalent on Deep South plantations, making emigration from states such as Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia noticeably less common. For farmers from the Upper South, the soil in their native states was often devoid of nutrients due to overuse and uneducated farming practices; fresh land in the West held the potential for recovering any previous losses and stabilizing their household finances. Furthermore, residents of the Upper South were accustomed to diversified agriculture and its labor requirements, making Missouri a prime location where they could effectively transplant their own cultural, social, and economic values.²⁵ These environmental incentives, combined with the continued subjugation of native tribes like the Osage, made the new state an appealing prospect for settlement. Although non-slaveholders emigrated to Missouri from Midwestern states such as Illinois and Indiana, as did non-slaveholders from the South, the majority of settlers entering the border counties came from regions where slavery was well-

²⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourth Census of the United States*, 1820, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1821); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifth Census of the United States*, 1830, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1831).

²⁵ Burke, "On Slavery's Borders," 6-7.

established; these men and women understood slavery to be a labor system which reinforced a strict racial hierarchy that privileged all whites, not just those who owned human property.

The first federal census to collect data concerning individuals' place of birth was the 1850 population schedule, but by locating slaveholders in the 1850 census who had come to Missouri in the 1830s or 1840s, it is possible to partially trace emigration into western Missouri and produce both an analysis of individuals and useful aggregate data. For example, a slaveholder named Weekly Dale settled in Clay County, Missouri, at some point prior to the 1840 census, which stated that he owned two male slaves between the ages of fifteen and twenty six, and he also appeared in the 1850 census for that same county with seven slaves. In the 1850 census we learn that Dale came from Kentucky.²⁶ More importantly, an examination of just one township in that border county—Clay County—reveals that among adults over the age of eighteen who were born outside Missouri, a vast percentage came from the Upper South.²⁷ Residents from the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina composed 88.5 percent of the population there. The total

²⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States*, 1840, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1841); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States*, 1850, Slave Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853).

²⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States*, 1850, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853). I narrowed the data to adults of both sexes of at least eighteen years because a high percentage of those under the age of majority were born in Missouri. This computation also excludes those over the age of eighteen who listed their birthplace as Missouri and the three individuals who were born outside the United States (Scotland and Ireland specifically). The percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

population in the county in 1850 was 10,332, with 7,585 free white persons, 2,742 slaves, and five free blacks.²⁸

Table 1: State of Origin Statistics for Washington Township, Clay County, Missouri

State of Origin (excluding Missouri)	Number of Emigrants	Percentage of Population
Kentucky	198	45.0
North Carolina	98	22.3
Tennessee	50	11.4
Virginia	43	9.8
Ohio	7	1.6
Indiana	5	1.1
New York	4	0.9
South Carolina	4	0.9
Maryland	3	0.7
New Jersey	3	0.7
Alabama	2	0.5
Pennsylvania	2	0.5
Florida	1	0.2
Georgia	1	0.2
Unknown/Illegible	19	4.3
Total	440	100

Information from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853).

There were other developments on the western border that encouraged emigration into the region, or at the very least brought travelers through the area. Beginning in the 1840s, Independence in Jackson County served as the start of the overland routes to Oregon and California, which passed through Indian Territory (including the modern-day counties of Johnson, Douglas, and Shawnee County,

²⁸ In 1850, Clay County, Missouri, contained approximately 16 percent of the total population of the seven Missouri counties covered in this study. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853).

Kansas). Also the Santa Fe Trail, which had been in existence officially since 1825 and spanned the southern reaches of Indian Territory, led to an outcropping of trading posts that made themselves available for outfitting Santa Fe freighters. Both of these developments brought increased foot traffic onto the border as merchants and outfitters started businesses in border towns like Westport and Independence.

Impact of Indian Removal

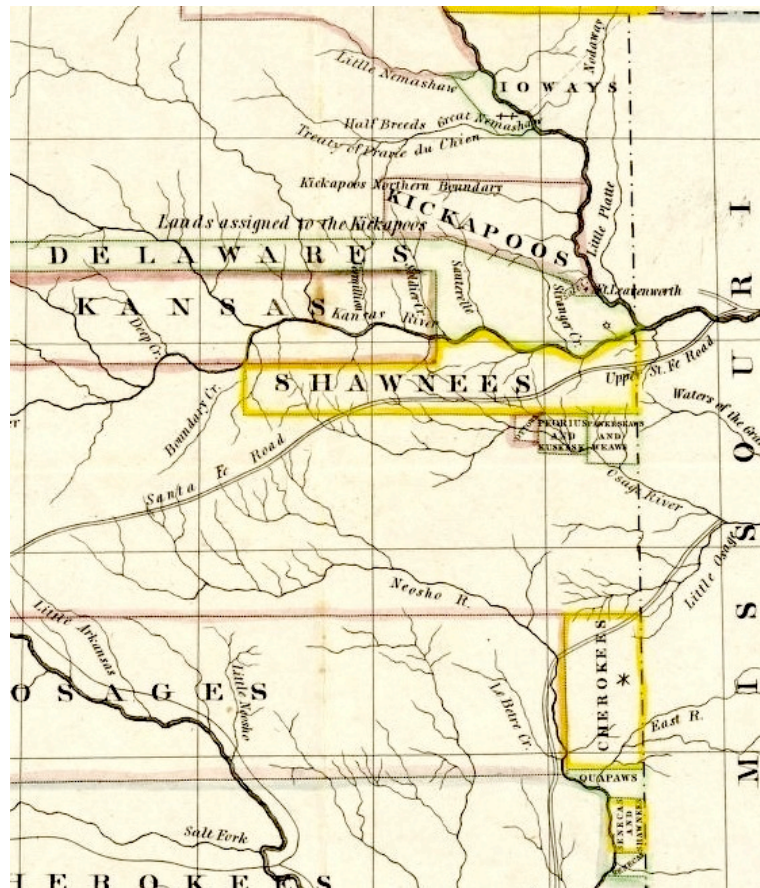
When Missouri gained statehood in 1820 there were very few white or enslaved individuals living west of the border, but this would change in 1830. In that year, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act which moved Native American tribes from the eastern United States into a newly-designated Indian Territory situated just west of the main sites of white American settlement. Per the language in the act, the “United States will forever secure and guaranty to them, and their heirs or successors, the country so exchanged with them,” a promise that would go unfulfilled.²⁹ A total of forty-five tribes, coming from lands reaching from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, fell under the jurisdiction of this act, and at least twenty-five of those tribes were given land in what is today eastern Kansas, then known as northern Indian Territory.³⁰ These tribes included the Delaware, Kickapoo, Pottawatomie, Shawnee, Wyandot, Sauk and Fox, and Ottawa (among others), while tribes from the southeast

²⁹ “United States Congress, Indian Removal Act, May 28, 1830,” in Theda Purdue and Michael Green, eds., *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*, 123-125 (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2005), 123.

³⁰ Isaac McCoy, “Names and Numbers of Indian Tribes Which Must Have Possessions in the Indian Territory,” November 1, 1832, in Isaac McCoy Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

like the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole ended up resettling in southern Indian Territory, which is present-day Oklahoma.³¹

Figure 4: Northern Indian Territory in 1836



United States Topographic Bureau, “Map Showing the Lands Assigned to Emigrant Indians West of Arkansas and Missouri,” 1836. Map courtesy of the Library of Congress.³²

³¹ William E. Unrau, *Indians of Kansas: The Euro-American Invasion and Conquest of Indian Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1991), 56-59.

³² The larger version of this map includes all of modern-day Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Oklahoma. Not all twenty-five tribes who relocated to Kansas are adequately represented on this map because some tribes had not resettled until after 1836 (including the Wyandot). For further discussion of Indian removal in Kansas, see H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871*, new ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990) and William E. Unrau, *Indians of Kansas: The Euro-American Invasion and Conquest of Indian Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1991).

Although some white trappers, teamsters, military officers, and adventurers had set foot on Kansas soil before the passage of the Indian Removal Act, this act ushered in a new emigration of white Americans, including Indian agents, military officers, traders, and Christian missionaries to the emigrant tribes. Alongside these emigrants came bondspeople and their masters. Unlike the political environment present on the Kansas-Missouri border during Bleeding Kansas, these slaveholders brought slaves as a convenience to themselves and their families; the doctrine of popular sovereignty would not be in force until 1854, and at this point it was as yet unclear whether or not Indian Territory would indeed pass away to make room for further white settlement. Consequently, while Southerners did indeed hope to spread their slaveholding culture westward, the deeply rooted, divisive partisan politics of the territorial period were not present during Kansas' brief stint as Indian Territory.

A few of the emigrant tribes affected by the government's removal policies had adopted white understandings of slavery, either because of the civilization program's emphasis on assimilation or the influence of mixed-race tribal members, who bore the cultural heritage of both white Americans and indigenous peoples.³³ The sometimes-painful adjustments that were part and parcel of the civilization process meant that native peoples developed a set of cultural values that blended Native American social practices with white concepts of racial difference. For native slaveholders, like their white counterparts, slavery became a sign of material wealth and privilege; as historian Annie Abel argued, "the acquisition of slaves enabled

³³ Unrau, *Indians of Kansas*, 42-49. James Oakes argues that, in the case of Native American slaveholders, "the ownership of slaves was a reliable indicator that the master had accepted many of the values of white society" (Oakes, 46).

Native peoples to distance themselves from African-Americans in an increasingly racist white society.”³⁴

Even though the Wyandot and Shawnee tribes had slaveholders in their midst (albeit in small numbers), many emigrant tribes did not support the slave system.³⁵ According to Lucy Armstrong, an early settler in Kansas Territory of both white and Wyandot ancestry, “more than three-fourths of the Wyandotts were anti-slavery. Those who were pro-slavery were descendants of Virginians who had been taken prisoners by the Wyandotts during the wars in Ohio.”³⁶ The situation was complicated, however. After the Methodist Church split into northern and southern factions in 1844, with the Methodist Church South gaining control over Indian Territory, at least some of the Wyandot reemphasized their distaste for slaveholding and maintained that it “is the main objection we have to the new church yet we distinctly disclaim being abolitionists.”³⁷ This would foreshadow future conflicts over the existence of this labor system, as diverse native tribes navigated the challenges of acculturation and increasing pressure to adopt white values and customs.

³⁴ Annie Heloise Abel, *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 2.

³⁵ For particulars about the civilization process among the Shawnee, see Kevin Abing, “Before Bleeding Kansas: Christian Missionaries, Slavery, and the Shawnee Indians in Pre-Territorial Kansas, 1844-1854,” *Kansas History* 24 (Spring 2001), 56-58.

³⁶ Franklin Adams, “Wyandotte,” c. 1880, in Indians History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

³⁷ Unsigned letter from the Wyandotte Nation, January 4, 1849, in Indians History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Prominent Slaveholders on the Border

While it is difficult to track down the exact numbers, at least three prominent native leaders—William Walker of the Wyandot, Joseph Parks of the Shawnee, and Baptiste Peoria of the Confederated Tribes—were part of the slaveholding class.³⁸

All three men were of mixed-race ancestry and were prime examples of the civilization process, having embraced agriculture, animal husbandry, and English education for their children.³⁹ It is no surprise, then, that these men owned slaves.

Joseph Parks led the Hog Creek band of the Shawnee to Kansas from Ohio in 1833.⁴⁰ According to one of Francis Parkman's travelogues, Parks owned a trading establishment in Westport, Missouri, in addition to his large farm and "a considerable number of slaves."⁴¹ By sometime in 1843 he had purchased his first slave, a sixteen-year-old man who worked as a blacksmith.⁴² Henry Harvey described Parks as "a sensible, intelligent man who had long been engaged in public business.... His house has been the resort of all classes and the sums he bestowed on his people constituted a fortune, yet he remained a wealthy man."⁴³ Parks' role as chief required that he handle relations between the Shawnee and the U. S. government; he worked as an interpreter and also traveled to Washington, D. C. to negotiate more benefits for his

³⁸ The Confederated Tribes were the Kaskaskia, Peoria, Wea and Piankashaw. See Miner and Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas*, 76.

³⁹ Adrienne Christopher, "Captain Joseph Parks: Chief of the Shawnee Indians," *Westport Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (June 1969), 13.

⁴⁰ Martha B. Caldwell, *Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School*, 2nd ed. (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1977), 17.

⁴¹ Caldwell, *Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission*, 58.

⁴² Kevin Abing, "Before Bleeding Kansas: Christian Missionaries, Slavery, and the Shawnee Indians in Pre-Territorial Kansas, 1844-1854," *Kansas History* 24 (Spring 2001), 58.

⁴³ Christopher, "Captain Joseph Parks," 14.

tribe. His experience garnered him a great deal of influence and respect within Westport and surrounding communities.

William Walker and his fellow Wyandot came to the eastern border of Indian Territory toward the end of the removal process, in 1843.⁴⁴ Walker was of English, French, and native descent. His father, William Walker Sr., had been captured by the Delaware and taken from his home in Virginia while a small child, and later he was adopted into the Wyandot tribe. William Walker Sr. then married Catherine Rankin, a well-educated and refined woman of French and Indian ancestry. William Walker Jr. acted as a chief of the Wyandots and later as provisional governor of Nebraska Territory.⁴⁵ Like Parks, Walker “led the ideal life of a gentleman of ample means,” which included a reliance on slave labor.⁴⁶

The last of these native leaders was Baptiste Peoria, an interpreter who worked with the Confederated Tribes (composed of the Kaskaskia, Peoria, Wea, and Piankeshaw) who relocated to present-day Miami County, Kansas. He reportedly owned an enslaved woman.⁴⁷ Peoria had a special place within the local community, having helped form the first emigrant settlement in the area called “Peoria Village.” In June 1857, after Kansas had been opened up to white settlement, Peoria was

⁴⁴ “Wyandott County, Our Recollection of By-Gone Days, with a Little History from other Sources,” *The Wyandott Herald*, July 6, 1876, in Wyandotte County Clippings, vol. 3, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁵ William E. Connelley, *The Emigrant Indian Tribes of Wyandotte County* (Topeka: Crane and Company, 1901), 18-19.

⁴⁶ Connelley, 14.

⁴⁷ Samuel L. Adair to Zu Adams, September 16, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

elected president of Paola's town company, testifying to his continued importance in the area.⁴⁸

Other influential slaveholders within Indian Territory were Protestant missionaries charged with the duty of caring for Indian souls. From 1832 to 1869, there were twenty seven operating Protestant missions; with the exception of two missions, all of these were founded when Kansas was Indian country. The most well-known of these missionaries was Thomas Johnson, a Virginian who set up the first Methodist Mission to the Shawnee in 1830. In 1839, Johnson moved the mission to its present location (in Fairway, Kansas) and enlarged its ministry to include a manual labor school for Indian children that would form the basis of a thriving community. After the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Johnson continued to promote slavery's expansion; by this point Johnson had at least six slaves, according to the territorial census taken in November 1854.⁴⁹ Another missionary, Samuel Irvin, ran a mission school at the Nemaha agency for the Sac and Fox tribe, and at some point Irvin hired an enslaved woman from Missouri to labor as a cook. According to a white neighbor's reminiscence, Irvin purchased this woman and emancipated her; this most likely occurred after 1854 because Irvin appeared in the first territorial census with one slave in his household.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cutler, 111, 161.

⁴⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1855). Interestingly, in District 17 (a portion of modern-day Johnson County, Kansas) the census taker was Thomas Johnson's son, Alexander Johnson, who was also a slaveholder.

⁵⁰ Statement of Benjamin Harding, October 13, 1881, in Benjamin Harding Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1855). In the census, his name was listed as Samuel McIrvin, which appears to be a corruption of his full name, Samuel M. Irvin.

Along with missionaries, some of the earliest—and most prominent—whites in the border region were slaveowning traders like Francois Chouteau, who had a trading post on the Kansas River at the border between Kansas and Missouri, founded in 1821 shortly after Missouri statehood. In the 1820s, this area surrounding modern-day Kansas City was dominated by the fur trade, and the Chouteau brothers were part of the esteemed French family from St. Louis that engendered this reputation. Earlier, in 1819, Francois had built the first fur trading post on the Kansas River, about two and a half miles east of present De Soto, Kansas, a joint effort with his cousin Gabriel.⁵¹ The governor of Spanish Louisiana had granted Francois's father Pierre Chouteau and his uncle, Auguste Chouteau, exclusive trading rights with the Osage; thus Francois grew up learning the fur business. After marrying Berenice Menard, also of French descent and a slaveowner herself, the young couple traveled on a pirogue down the Missouri River with their two young sons and at least one slave. They settled near Francois's primary fur warehouse, near where the Missouri and Kansas rivers met. The Chouteaus accumulated several more slaves over the course of their marriage. After Francois's death in 1838, the widowed Berenice moved to Westport Landing, in Missouri, and the Chouteau warehouse in Kansas City was no longer a major staging area for the fur trade. Gradually the influx of Anglo-American settlers on the Kansas-Missouri border made the French influence seem a distant reality.⁵² Nevertheless, prior to the mid-1840s, French traders like the

⁵¹ Dorothy Brandt Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa: The Letters of Francois and Berenice Chouteau*, ed. David Boutros, trans. Marie-Laure Dionne Pal (Kansas City: Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Kansas City, 2001), 24.

⁵² Marra, 173.

Chouteau family were well-known and highly respected members of the community, making their ownership of slaves a visible part of life on the Kansas-Missouri border.

Indian agents who served as liaisons with the government also shared in the fledgling establishment of slavery in Indian Territory and neighboring Missouri. Two of the most influential Indian agents within the territory were Richard Cummins and John Dougherty, and both were slaveholders. Richard Cummins lived on a farm adjacent to the Shawnee Indian Manual Labor School in present-day Johnson County, Kansas, and employed at least a dozen slaves.⁵³ Cummins was officially the agent of the Shawnee tribe, although later he was placed in charge of all the Indian agents in the territory, and according to a reminiscence left by W. R. Bernard, Cummins' "large experience, tact, and influence with the Indians often made his services invaluable to the government."⁵⁴ As Indian agent, Cummins assisted missionary Thomas Johnson in setting up the Shawnee Methodist Mission both at its original site (near Turner) and at its current site in Johnson County, Kansas.⁵⁵ Cummins also supported the civilization process, which demanded that native tribes abandon their traditional ways and embrace white, European cultural mores. For some Indians—including those in Kansas and other tribes further south, like the Five Civilized Tribes—becoming fully assimilated into white culture entailed becoming an active part of the slave system,

⁵³ Alexander S. Johnson, "Slaves in Kansas Territory," April 20, 1895, in Alexander Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS; Kristen Tegtmeier Ortel, *Bleeding Borders: Race, Gender, and Violence in Pre-Civil War Kansas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 39.

⁵⁴ W. R. Bernard to George W. Martin, July 24, 1905, in W. R. Bernard Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁵ Caldwell, 12, 25-26.

and as a slaveholder himself, it is quite plausible that Cummins supported natives' efforts to acquire human property.⁵⁶

The other prominent slaveholding Indian agent was John Dougherty, a Kentuckian who came to Fort Leavenworth in 1828. Over the course of the next ten years, Dougherty attended to Indian business at Fort Leavenworth in addition to his work in St. Louis, headquarters of the western division of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.⁵⁷ He later moved across the river to Clay County, Missouri. Cummins and Dougherty were intimately involved with settling emigrant tribes on their new lands, mitigating land disputes, cracking down on alcohol trafficking, distributing annuity payments, and corresponding with the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, William Clark (of Lewis and Clark fame). According to a reminiscence recorded by Lewis Dougherty, John Dougherty "had a great influence with the Indian Tribes from the Missouri [River] to the Columbia [River] and assisted the United States in making many treaties. His Indian name in English was Controller of Fire Water, among his agency Indians."⁵⁸ In a land dominated by the Native American presence, Indian agents wielded measurable power.

Dougherty was not the only slaveowner to live at Fort Leavenworth in its early years. Although some officers did periodically hire slaves from neighboring Missouri,⁵⁹ two prominent figures at the fort—Colonel Hiram Rich, the post sutler,

⁵⁶ Caldwell, 12.

⁵⁷ Lewis B. Dougherty, "Biographical Sketch of John Dougherty," in John Dougherty Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁸ Lewis B. Dougherty, "Biographical Sketch of John Dougherty," in John Dougherty Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁹ P. J. Lowe to Zu Adams, May 20, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

and Major Maclin—owned slaves. Hiram Rich moved from Liberty, Missouri, to Fort Leavenworth in 1841 and acted as a leader of the pro-slavery party. Sutlers, who were responsible for supplying general goods to the military and civilians living at the fort, were “king over all territory tributary to a military post.”⁶⁰ According to a newspaper article in the *Leavenworth Times*, “few men, if any, in the west, were better known than Colonel Hiram Rich, Fort Leavenworth’s sutler.... He knew everybody in the Platte Purchase and every Missourian who came to this side never failed to call on the Colonel. The latch string was always out, for those who were ‘sound on the goose’ in particular.”⁶¹ Rich served the fort’s inhabitants in this capacity until his death in 1862.⁶² As sutler, Rich controlled the flow of material goods into the fort, and he could thus be considered a crucial and prominent element central to the fort’s success. The historical record sheds little light on Maclin’s life, other than a brief reference to the fact that he was from Arkansas and entered the Confederate army in 1861.⁶³

After the opening of Indian Territory, slaveholders also immigrated to Fort Scott, located in present-day Bourbon County, Kansas. One of the earliest settlers at

⁶⁰ Henry Schindler, “A Post Trader, A King Here in the Early Days,” *Leavenworth Times*, November 19, 1911, in History of Fort Leavenworth Clippings, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁶¹ Henry Schindler, “When Slaves Were Owned in Kansas by Army Officers,” *Leavenworth Times*, October 13, 1912, in History of Fort Leavenworth Clippings, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The Platte Purchase was a section of land alongside the Missouri River (consisting of the modern counties of Atchison, Nodaway, Holt, Andrew, Buchanan and Platte in Missouri) that the United States government purchased from the Sac and Fox and the Iowa tribes in 1836. The term “sound on the goose” was code for identifying oneself as a pro-slavery partisan; for a lengthier etymology of the term, see Emmett Redd and Nicole Etcheson, “‘Sound on the Goose’: A Search for the Answer to an Age Old ‘Question,’” *Kansas History* 32, no. 3 (August 2009): 204-217, and Frank Wilson Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, Etc.*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Standard Publishing, 1912), 765.

⁶² Henry Schindler, “A Post Trader, A King Here in the Early Days,” *Leavenworth Times*, November 19, 1911, in History of Fort Leavenworth Clippings, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁶³ Henry Schindler, “When Slaves Were Owned in Kansas by Army Officers,” *Leavenworth Times*, October 13, 1912, in History of Fort Leavenworth Clippings, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Fort Scott was a slaveholding Kentuckian named Hiero T. Wilson, who moved up from Fort Gibson (in the southern part of Indian Territory, which is now Oklahoma), and opened up a sutler business with John Bugg in 1843. In 1844, shortly after this business venture began, Wilson hired an enslaved man named Louis (who was a slave of Samuel Moore), presumably to assist in the store, and about six months later he hired Nancy, a slave of Lieutenant R. E. Cochran.⁶⁴ After about five or six years Bugg moved to California, and Wilson became the sole sutler in addition to serving as U. S. postmaster.⁶⁵ He also had significant contact with the local emigrant tribes and those tribes who were native to the Missouri-Kansas border. In fact, during the fort's early period, from roughly 1843 to 1852, most of his business was conducted with tribes like the Osage, who called him "Big White Chief."⁶⁶ His influence was further recognized after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, when he served as one of the first officers for the county and as a trustee of the town of Fort Scott.⁶⁷ These white Americans—missionaries, traders, military men, and Indian agents—brought with them their dedication to the Southern slave system in the form of enslaved African Americans. So did the native slaveholders who had become

⁶⁴ Hiero T. Wilson Daybook, Volume 1, 1844-1845, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The term "slave hiring" can have one of two meanings. First, hiring or "renting out" a slave can refer to cases where slaveowners hired out their slaves and kept all (or most) of the slave's profits. Second, some slaves were allowed to "hire out" their own time in order to earn their freedom, although this situation was far less common. For a thorough discussion of slave hiring, see Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). These daybooks also include detailed lists of the foodstuffs and other supplies that passed through his sutler store and names of customers on account; patrons included military officers and enlisted men, non-military personnel and travelers passing by. Some of the goods for sale might be termed "luxury" items, including "kian" pepper and other spices, glass doorknobs, harmonicas, and dictionaries.

⁶⁵ T. F. Robley, *History of Bourbon County, Kansas, to the Close of 1865* (Fort Scott, KS, 1894), 12.

⁶⁶ Clifford H. Lyman, *Aaahh Bourbon, 1842-1865* (Self published, 1984), 23-25.

⁶⁷ Robley, 44-48. According to Charles Cory's early history of slavery in Kansas, there were other slaveholding settlers at the fort in its early years, but it is not clear when these settlers arrived, nor are all of them identified conclusively. See Charles E. Cory, "Slavery in Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1901-1902* 7 (Topeka: W. Y. Morgan, 1902), 236-237.

acquainted with the slave system. Though their numbers may have been small, these slaveholders were renowned throughout the territory and thus made slavery a visible facet of life on the frontier.

Enslaved African Americans Enter the Border Region

Yet the deeper question is, what were the slaves' relationships with their owners? Understanding that slaveholders were well-respected members of society is one thing; uncovering the slave experience is quite another. Although few first-person accounts by slaves have survived, it is still possible to understand how life on the frontier remolded the slave system. For the majority of slaveholders on the border, the reasons for holding slaves were two fold. First, slaveholding emigrants coming from the South (including the young state of Missouri) supported the expansion of the slave system into the West; the doctrine of popular sovereignty did not apply to white settlements in early Indian Territory, but that did not mean that slaveholders were ambivalent to the spread of the peculiar institution. According to historian James David Miller, slaveholding families who emigrated to the West "proved incapable of thinking about western land without reference to the human property they knew would transform it for them," making clear their interest in supporting slavery's spread.⁶⁸

Slaveholders' dedication to perpetuating this system shows in their political activities during the later period of Bleeding Kansas. One example of this philosophy is that of Thomas Johnson, head missionary at the Shawnee Methodist Mission.

⁶⁸ Miller, 5.

Johnson was active in efforts to establish slavery in Kansas Territory, serving as a pro-slavery delegate to the first territorial legislature elected in 1855.⁶⁹ Hiram Rich and Hiero Wilson, both Southerners and both slaveholders, also actively supported the pro-slavery forces within Kansas Territory once the conflict over popular sovereignty reached full force during Bleeding Kansas.

Second, slaves contributed to the white family's well-being, financial success, and happiness, which was particularly important to white families living on the western stretches of white settlement. Slaveholding on the border, as in Missouri and other Southern states, was an outward sign of wealth in addition to its tangible, material benefits to the white slaveholder and his family. Bill Simms, a former slave who grew up in Osceola, Missouri, noted this tie when he recalled later that "a man who owned ten slaves was considered wealthy."⁷⁰ Berenice Chouteau, Francois's wife who accompanied him to the frontier, purchased a slave girl named Nancy (of unknown age) in 1837 as a playmate and personal attendant for her young daughter Mary Brigitte. Presumably Nancy would also help out around the house doing domestic chores and consequently contributed to the family's well being in a concrete way, as well as a psychological one, since Berenice was often left alone when Francois traveled on business.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Caldwell, 85.

⁷⁰ Bill Simms, "Ex Slave Story," c. 1938, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves*, vol. 6, *Kansas Narratives* (Washington D.C., 1941), 8. Another example of this is "The Negro Race in History Hereabouts," *Kansas City Star*, July 11, 1912, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 6, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The unidentified author of that article stated that "not to own slaves indicated property, or what was worse, if a man was able to own negroes and did not own them he was suspected of being a 'black abolitionist' and was detested accordingly."

⁷¹ Marra, 161-162.

Depending on the circumstances, some bondspeople entered the region alongside their owners, while others came after being purchased elsewhere, usually somewhere in central or eastern Missouri. Thomas Johnson did not own any slaves before entering Indian Territory, acquiring them later in life. For instance Jackson Dempson, also called “Uncle Jack,” came to Indian Territory after being purchased by Thomas Johnson while in Plum Creek, Missouri, sometime in 1837 or 1838. According to his son Alexander Johnson’s reminiscence, Thomas Johnson “noticed a likely young colored man for sale. He stood with the crowd watching the proceedings, when the man, evidently noticing that father was sympathizing with him, commenced to beg father to buy him.”⁷² Jackson labored as Johnson’s “body servant” well into the Bleeding Kansas era and was the “major domo” of the mission establishment.⁷³

Of course, not all slaves were legally brought into the territory. Ann Shatteo was born a free woman in Illinois but was kidnapped and taken to Missouri, dressed in boy’s clothing to disguise her identity. Given that her abductor, Green Crisp, did not acquire her legally and lacked any paperwork, he had a difficult time selling her. Shatteo ended up being hired out at several different times because Crisp wanted to make a profit on his investment. After spending time at several different sites on the border, including the Harmony Mission to the Osage in present-day Bates County,

⁷² Alexander S. Johnson, “Slaves in Kansas Territory,” April 20, 1895, in Alexander Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷³ Caldwell, 85. Here the term “body servant” functions as a euphemism for slave.

Missouri, she ended up in Indian Territory. Her time there was spent working in the household of Hiero T. Wilson at Fort Scott.⁷⁴

Slaves on the frontier, like their owners, often lived far away from their families and had little hope of seeing their loved ones again. However, according to most surviving reminiscences, the enslaved inhabitants of Indian Territory lived with at least some of their family members. In 1895 Alexander Johnson, son of missionary Thomas Johnson, recalled that Richard Cummins “owned slaves, several, a family and parts of other families.”⁷⁵ Anne Shatteo had at least three children who apparently moved with her as she switched owners and was hired out, although her first owner, who kidnapped her from her home in Illinois, apparently took her children to Texas at some point before she moved to Fort Scott.⁷⁶ While some slaveowners made a concerted effort to keep slave families together, their motives are more difficult to expose. Perhaps the very real hardships of frontier life convinced slaveholders that it was in their best interest to keep their slaves as happy (and loyal) as possible.

Though friendships with fellow slaves could never replace a beloved relative, slaves on the border did have opportunities to interact with other slaves who lived nearby, usually because of the close business and personal relationships among the prominent slaveholders in the area. For instance Frederick Chouteau, Francois’ brother and partner in the fur business, had a post near the first Shawnee Mission,

⁷⁴ “Aunt Ann’s Story: More than Thirty Years in Kansas,” *Kansas Daily Commonwealth*, May 12, 1875, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁵ Alexander S. Johnson, “Slaves in Kansas Territory,” April 20, 1895, in Alexander Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁶ “Aunt Ann’s Story: More than Thirty Years in Kansas,” *Kansas Daily Commonwealth*, May 12, 1875, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

established near present-day Turner in Indian Territory. Although Frederick did not own slaves, his brother did, strongly suggesting that Francois's slaves may have had contact with slaves who worked at the mission. Also, both Richard Cummins and Joseph Parks lived very close to the second Shawnee Mission (the one that exists today),⁷⁷ and each of these slaveholders went to the mission grounds for both business and pleasure; they probably brought their slaves with them on some of these occasions. Thomas Johnson Greene, who grew up at the mission, recalled in his reminiscence that "army officers, or officials connected with government affairs in the territory, were welcome and halted as they came, or went west as well as missionaries and ministers."⁷⁸ No reminiscences or other records written by slaves have survived, making these testimonies of white residents the only available source for understanding the slave system and the experiences of enslaved African Americans.

Slaves owned by the Chouteau family, living at a busy crossroads where trappers, traders, government officials, and local citizens congregated, had regular contact with other enslaved people. The Chouteau posts and their Kansas City (Missouri) warehouse were popular meeting places; many of these visitors were slaveholders who probably brought a slave with them as they conducted business. For example, in 1832 a Methodist minister from Tennessee, James Porter, came out West to aid in the ongoing missionary efforts. He left his family, livestock, and thirty slaves at Chouteau's trading post while he procured land and a residence, finally

⁷⁷ Phyllis Edwards Kite, "History of Westport Methodist Church," 1964, in Monograph Collection, Jackson County (Mo.) Historical Society and Archives, Independence (hereafter JCHS).

⁷⁸ Thomas Johnson Greene, "Recollections of Shawnee Mission," *The Annals of Kansas City* 1, no. 4 (October 1924), 456.

settling in the Westport area on the Missouri side of the border.⁷⁹ No sources created by the Chouteau slaves have survived, but this example illustrates that they had some contact with other slaves living in the region.

Slaves' Daily Experiences

Most slaves were intimately connected with their slaveholders through labor. As Diane Mutti Burke has argued, the emphasis on small-scale slaveholding in Missouri (a trend transplanted to Indian Territory) led to the establishment of the family farm as the predominant agricultural unit, a situation which often demanded that both slave and slaveowner perform manual labor.⁸⁰ This situation was quite unlike the slave system that existed in the heavily populated areas of the Deep South, where large planters and the white members of the household adopted a primarily managerial role.⁸¹ Two of Richard Cummins' sons worked alongside two or three slaves and cut wood in the forest.⁸² Francois Chouteau's booming fur business made it necessary for at least one of his male slaves to assist at the warehouse. Jackson, Thomas Johnson's right hand man, played a leading role in the work done at the

⁷⁹ Phyllis Edwards Kite, "History of Westport Methodist Church," 1964, in Monograph Collection, JCHS.

⁸⁰ Burke, 29-30.

⁸¹ Of course, small-scale slaveholding did exist in the Lower South, but not with the same frequency that it occurred in the Upper South. An excellent scholarly treatment of this aspect of the slave system is Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). McCurry argues that "the ownership of slaves, whatever its other meanings, was not the fundamental dividing line between yeoman and planter.... It took more than a few slaves to transform a farmer's productive role into a purely supervisory one or to relieve his wife and children of the necessity of regular farm labor. Clearly a combination of factors—the amount of land to be worked; the number, age, and sex of family members; and the number, age, and sex of slaves—determined who were 'self-working farmers'" (48).

⁸² Alexander S. Johnson, "Slaves in Kansas Territory," April 20, 1895, in Alexander Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Shawnee Mission, although accounts of his duties vary from working as Johnson's personal slave to being the "presiding genius of the culinary department."⁸³ A prominent resident of Fort Scott, Major General George A. McCall, owned at least one slave, a man named Jordan, who accompanied him on military excursions.⁸⁴

The self-sufficient settlement that surrounded the Shawnee Indian Mission and manual labor institute created an environment where male slaves were exposed to skilled labor. The situation at the mission was also unique in that slaves were not the only inexpensive labor source at Johnson's disposal; the native schoolchildren's curriculum included training in skills such as carpentry and blacksmithing for the boys, sewing and cooking for the girls. Consequently, it is likely that enslaved people worked alongside their native peers in the general upkeep of the mission grounds. By 1835, a machine shop had been built in order to educate Indian boys in the skills they would need to assimilate into white society. By 1837 these young men could also learn marketable skills including cabinet making, shoemaking, carpentry, wagon making, and blacksmithing. According to Alexander S. Johnson, Thomas Johnson's eldest son who spent his childhood at the mission, "there was a mill in connection with the Mission for the grinding of wheat and corn, a saw-mill for cutting lumber, and a wagon-shop, blacksmith shop, and shoemakers shop.... There was also a store of general merchandise for the benefit of the Mission and Indians living in the vicinity."⁸⁵ Although it is not possible to track down the exact day-to-day influence

⁸³ Alexander S. Johnson, "Slaves in Kansas Territory," April 20, 1895, in Alexander Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸⁴ Oertel, 38-39.

⁸⁵ Alexander S. Johnson, "Shawnee Mission Capital," February 17, 1896, in Alexander Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

of black artisans, it is certainly possible that some of the instruction and direction taking place at the trade school was the express responsibility of slaves, and most certainly slaves and native people worked side by side on a regular basis.⁸⁶

The slaves who worked for the Chouteau family undoubtedly had much contact with native tribes as well, since at least some of the male slaves spent time working at the Randolph Bluffs warehouse. These warehouses were typically quite large, storing not only the pelts brought east from the Rockies, but also trade goods such as cloth, blankets, guns, sugar, coffee, beads, and other trinkets that would be traded for fine pelts. Warehouses such as this were abuzz during the spring and summer, when local Native Americans, French trappers, and white locals congregated to do business. After an incoming shipment was unloaded from the canoe or wagon and negotiations for pay had concluded, Chouteau and his workers (including both enslaved and paid employees) would inspect, sort, and press the pelts and skins before wrapping them into packages.⁸⁷ Presumably his slaves and employees would also be responsible for keeping an accurate inventory of the European goods, in addition to helping with other essential elements of the commercial enterprise.

Agriculture was central to settlements in Indian Territory, both white and native, making the need for agricultural labor a pressing demand. Crops such as oats, wheat, and corn were popular, and in the case of the emigrant tribes this cultivation was considered necessary for the civilization program sponsored by the government to assimilate native peoples into white society. Many of the emigrant Indian tribes

⁸⁶ Caldwell, 39.

⁸⁷ Marra, 19.

had adopted white agricultural ways prior to their removal from the eastern United States, having had extensive contact with white Americans throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. According to Indian agent Richard Cummins, the Shawnee were well adapted to the European American way of life. In a report to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs written in 1842, Cummins remarked that the Shawnee had log cabins surrounded by fields where they cultivated both grains and garden vegetables, in addition to keeping cattle, hogs, turkeys and chickens. Similarly, in 1848 Cummins stated that nearly every Shawnee family had a well-established farm that closely resembled those found in white settlements, except for the “swarthy lineaments and strange language of the inhabitants.”⁸⁸ Shawnee slaveholders like Joseph Parks were part of this civilization process (in his case due partly to his mixed heritage), and they undoubtedly employed many of their slaves in agricultural tasks.

Of course, slaves owned by native people were not the only slaves employed in agricultural labor. In 1833, Francois Chouteau wrote, “I bought his [Meyers] mulatto.... He [the slave] is very expensive but he is skillful and a good farmer and we have the greatest difficulty obtaining men here.”⁸⁹ In addition to his fur business, Chouteau owned a farm in the bottom lands near his Kansas City warehouse.⁹⁰ Also, the Shawnee mission grounds were quite extensive, including a large orchard and

⁸⁸ Caldwell, 62.

⁸⁹ Marra, 117.

⁹⁰ Marra, 143.

agricultural fields. Here the male pupils were introduced to agriculture, and undoubtedly male slaves were part of this process.⁹¹

The evidence strongly suggests that slaveholders in the border region believed in a gendered division of labor for their slaves, with enslaved men performing more difficult farm work and women working primarily within the home. In contrast to historian Jacqueline Jones' assertion that "slaveholders had little use for sentimental platitudes about the delicacy of the female constitution" when dividing tasks among members of the household, it appears that slaveholders did take the enslaved individual's gender into consideration.⁹² The 1830 Missouri census showed the Chouteaus owning an adult female slave and a slave girl, who worked in the large frame house built according to the French style and lived in slave cabins located nearby.⁹³ According to the 1840 Missouri census, Ann Shatteo's owner, George Douglas, operated a farm and had a large family, making it likely that Shatteo was responsible for child care as well as helping out on the farm.⁹⁴ Although Indian girls at the Shawnee Mission did learn how to cook, sew, and keep house, the main cook for the settlement was one of Thomas Johnson's female slaves, Charlotte. Likely Charlotte's female children assisted her in the kitchen. There is no surviving evidence that the female slaves at the mission, at the Chouteau homestead, or on other farms worked alongside men in labor-intensive tasks such as building fences,

⁹¹ Caldwell, 50.

⁹² Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 15.

⁹³ Marra, 144, 149.

⁹⁴ The U.S. census shows that, in 1840, nine members of the household were listed as being involved in agriculture. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Population Schedules* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1841).

plowing, or making other physical improvements on the farm. It is, however, possible that a shortage of male labor could have encouraged some slaveowners to step outside the bounds of gender “propriety” and send their female slaves out to the field.

Slave hiring was also prominent on the border of Missouri and Indian Territory.⁹⁵ According to historians Clement Eaton and Sarah Hughes, slave hiring could allow greater flexibility within the slave system; it also allowed those settlers who could not afford to purchase slaves an opportunity to temporarily enter the slaveholding class and gain access to the benefits of slave labor.⁹⁶ Although neither of these historians focused on slave hiring in Missouri or Indian Territory, the existence and popularity of slave hiring in this region makes clear that renting out one’s slave had clear economic benefits for the slaveowner as well as the slave (both economic and otherwise). In addition, for those who gained temporary access to this labor, becoming a slave’s master (albeit temporarily) could bring some of the comforts of life in the eastern United States.

Several army officers at Fort Leavenworth including Chaplain Leander Kerr, also hired slaves from neighboring Missouri.⁹⁷ On several occasions the Chouteau family hired slaves to assist with their business. For instance in 1829, Francois hired

⁹⁵ See Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁹⁶ Sarah S. Hughes, “Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, VA, 1782-1810,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 35, no. 2 (April 1978): 260-286; Clement Eaton, “Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step Toward Freedom” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46 (1960): 663-678.

⁹⁷ Oertel, 39.

a mulatto man to pilot the boat transporting furs to St. Louis via the Missouri River.⁹⁸

The two slaves on record from the household of Hiero Wilson in Fort Scott—Louis and Lucy—were hired on a monthly rate, seven dollars for Louis and six for Lucy.⁹⁹ These prices resembling the hiring rates for slaves in central Missouri (outside the border region).

Judging from reminiscences and a few pieces of surviving correspondence, early slaveholders in Indian Territory placed heavy trust in their slaves. This included allowing their slaves to travel on errands and other trips through the countryside without supervision. For instance, Richard Cummins planned to make an annuity payment to the nearby Sac and Fox tribe but was delayed on business. In his stead he sent his slave with an ox-driven wagon. After finishing up his affairs, Cummins proceeded to the Sac and Fox camp, where he found his slave waiting for him.¹⁰⁰ Of course, with so few white and enslaved inhabitants, slaveowners were most likely well acquainted with their neighbors' property; this would foster a nineteenth-century version of a "neighborhood watch" program where one's neighbors would keep their eye on your slaves, expecting you to return the favor. This system of control was not unlike that in the South; however, because so few whites (and even fewer African-Americans) lived in Indian Territory, it was undoubtedly easier to keep a lookout for unusual behavior on the part of your neighbor's slaves.

Little concrete evidence exists to illuminate the nature of the slaves' relationships with their owners. There are, however, instances where descriptions of

⁹⁸ Marra, 56.

⁹⁹ Hiero T. Wilson Daybook, Volume 1, 1844-1845, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander S. Johnson, "Slaves in Kansas Territory," April 20, 1895, in Alexander Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

slaveholders' personalities can inform our understanding of these relationships. For instance, reminiscences about Thomas Johnson make clear that he maintained a firm hold on the day-to-day affairs of the mission. Nathan Scarritt, a missionary who worked alongside Johnson, spoke about Johnson's approach to management, writing that:

While possessed of deep and tender sympathies, he was, nevertheless, firm in his adherence to principle. This combination of qualities gave him an administrative ability unsurpassed by that of any man I ever knew. He had taken care to have all the departments of his school well manned, and to have the whole establishment thoroughly organized and reduced to the most perfect system.¹⁰¹

Another resident of the mission, Thomas Johnson Greene, aptly described the missionary as an autocrat. He wrote that Johnson was of "taciturn temperament," and "to him all matters were referred for final adjudication."¹⁰² An unidentified correspondent to the *New York Tribune* corroborates this. He described Johnson as a man having "a square, practical cast of countenance that guarantees his fidelity to the matter-of-fact details of business, but gives no promise whatever of creative intellect, or the high, generous impulses of imagination."¹⁰³ These descriptions illustrate how Johnson ruled over the mission: with a practical business sense and a firm hand that demanded complete obedience and acquiescence to his wishes.

The French style of slave management, practiced by Francois and Berenice Chouteau, appeared less authoritarian. For instance, Berenice wrote a letter to her father, Pierre Menard, in 1840, on behalf of a slave named Alexi, stating that Alexi

¹⁰¹ Nathan Scarritt, "Reminiscences of the Methodist Shawnee Mission and Religious Work Among that Tribe," *The Annals of Kansas City* 1, no. 4 (October 1924), 436.

¹⁰² Greene, "Recollections of Shawnee Mission," 455-456.

¹⁰³ Caldwell, 85.

“was looking for a master before my arrival from down there [St. Louis].... He greatly desires to come and stay with me for four or five years—that he will serve faithfully. But that he needs to leave from where he is living. I beg of you to see Polite [Hippolyte] on that subject and to write to me.”¹⁰⁴ Apparently this slave felt comfortable enough to express his desire to leave an unpleasant situation, and he had found an ally in Berenice. Berenice’s motives were not purely philanthropic, however, since earlier in the letter she had stated that she desperately needed men to work on her farm.¹⁰⁵

In conclusion, while few sources exist that can provide insight into the slave experience in Indian Territory, it is nevertheless clear that the growing slave system on the border was slavery in a different guise. Unlike plantation slavery traditionally associated with the Old South, slaveholding in Indian Territory was characterized by small-scale slaveholding that revolved around diverse labor needs and frequent, close contact between slaves and slaveowners. Furthermore, slaveholders in the territory were influential individuals who were active in their local community, holding some of the most esteemed positions within the government. The close business and personal relationships among these slaveholders allowed many slaves the opportunity to interact with their enslaved brethren living on another farm or in a nearby settlement. For whites, the hardships of frontier life further strengthened their relationships, fostering a deep bond as they struggled to adapt to their rugged existence in a land far removed from the comforts of Eastern society. Establishing a

¹⁰⁴ Marra, 177. Berenice had both an uncle and a cousin named Hippolyte; from the context it is unclear which one she is referring to.

¹⁰⁵ Marra, 177.

white American presence on the Kansas-Missouri border—which at the time was considered the western frontier—was no small task. Slave labor was therefore crucial to the success of the enterprise, whether it be a fur business, a Methodist mission, a fort, or an Indian agency.

Interestingly, slavery on the border existed partially outside the boundaries of the brewing sectional conflict over slavery's expansion that threatened to destabilize the already tenuous relationship between the free-state North and the pro-slavery South. During this period from 1825 to 1845, there was no deeply divisive confrontation over slavery that could compare to the events that occurred during Bleeding Kansas, when the doctrine of popular sovereignty went into full effect. Simply put, there was no border war because slavery existed on both sides of the line, and its expansion had not caused a political crisis akin to that of the 1850s.¹⁰⁶ When Missouri approached statehood in 1819, its inhabitants clearly articulated their desire to maintain slavery as a protection of white rights and supremacy; even among non-slaveholders, many of whom came from slaveholding states themselves, there was no widespread resistance to slavery during the ensuing conversations about statehood.¹⁰⁷ This is not to say that partisan struggles over slavery did not occur, since some of the emigrant tribes in Indian Territory and Methodist missionaries manifested internal

¹⁰⁶ The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had indeed spurred heated debate about slavery's expansion, but the political crisis involving this compromise was not a significant source of tension on the local level. Slavery existed in Missouri thanks to this compromise, and while pro-slavery and anti-slavery Missourians continued to disagree about slavery's place in the West, this partisan rhetoric did not threaten to tear apart the fabric of this frontier society.

¹⁰⁷ Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri*, Vol. II, 2nd ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 6-7.

divisions over the issue, but such conflicts did not occur with any regularity.¹⁰⁸ This profound difference makes the story of slavery in Indian Territory a significant addition to current historiography of Bleeding Kansas and the ensuing border war. The idiosyncrasies of this frontier life created a lively mix of black, white, and native, bound together by the shared struggle of living in this unfamiliar land.

¹⁰⁸ For further discussion of the Methodist Church's split over the slavery issue, consult Kevin Abing, "A Holy Battleground: Methodist, Baptist, and Quaker Missionaries Among the Shawnee Indians, 1830-1844," *Kansas History* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 188-237.

CHAPTER 2

LITTLE DIXIE: THE CREATION OF A WESTERN SLAVE SOCIETY, 1840-1854

Sometime in the early 1850s, a teenaged enslaved man named Larry Lapsley came to western Missouri from his birthplace of Danville, Kentucky. Lapsley's owner Samuel, an undisciplined and irresponsible ne'er-do-well who quickly squandered his inheritance, had brought Larry west, no doubt hoping to make a new life for himself in the growing settlements in Missouri, in what would become known as Little Dixie. Lapsley worked on a farm on the Little Blue River in Jackson County until Samuel purchased shares in a livery stable near Pleasant Hill, in Cass County, where Lapsley "was always at work."¹ After his owner continued to struggle with overwhelming debt, in 1859 Lapsley was sold to Samuel's brother-in-law William Bunor. As Lapsley recalled later, "One day he said to me, 'Larry, I want you to go over to my brother Wills for a few weeks and do some work for him as he wants you.' Not thinking anything strange by this command, I readily obeyed."² Later, Lapsley discovered in a conversation with some of Samuel's other slaves that in fact he had been sold to Bunor; he confronted Samuel on the matter but did not receive a

¹ "History of Larry Lapsley," undated, in Cecil Howe Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter KSHS). This reminiscence was published (with a few annotations) as Alberta Pantle, ed., "The Story of a Kansas Freedman," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (November 1942): 341-369.

² "History of Larry Lapsley," undated, in Cecil Howe Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

straight answer. Lapsley remained on the border until 1861, when Bunor took his slaves to Texas in an attempt to maintain control over his slave property.³

Lapsley's experiences in Jackson County, where Independence was located, and later in Cass County to the south, in many ways serve as a window into how the slave system on the Kansas-Missouri border functioned at the ground level. In Missouri, as elsewhere in the Upper South, slavery was predicated on a racial hierarchy that whites constantly reinforced through coercion and intimidation; this hierarchy encouraged the adoption of racial stereotypes that argued for blacks' inherent fitness for hard labor and their sub-par (and even sub-human) status within American society. In Lapsley's case, life involved a great degree of mobility and uncertainty, but his story also illustrates how slavery on the border was characterized by slaves' attempts to gain influence over their own futures. As settlers from the Upper South continued to flock into the border region, slaveholders reinvigorated their efforts to strengthen slavery while enslaved African Americans like Lapsley pushed back and questioned their owners' actions, wrestling a degree of autonomy from an otherwise coercive institution.

This chapter concentrates on how the slave labor system on the Kansas-Missouri border evolved from a society with slaves into a slave society, beginning in the 1840s when American emigration increased, the Platte Purchase opened for settlement, and most of the Eastern emigrant tribes affected by the Indian Removal

³ "History of Larry Lapsley," undated, in Cecil Howe Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. While down South, Lapsley would escape and end up in Salina, Kansas, after a harrowing journey through the wild brush of Indian Territory.

Act had resettled in Indian Territory.⁴ By this point the border was no stranger to slavery, being the home to slaves and also slaveholders from various walks of life, including missionaries, Indian agents, merchants, businessmen, and farmers.

Although this region is not normally associated with slave labor, in reality the border was transforming into a society so deeply entwined with slaveholding that in many respects it closely resembled the more established slave society that had taken root elsewhere in the Upper South.

Small-Scale Slaveholding

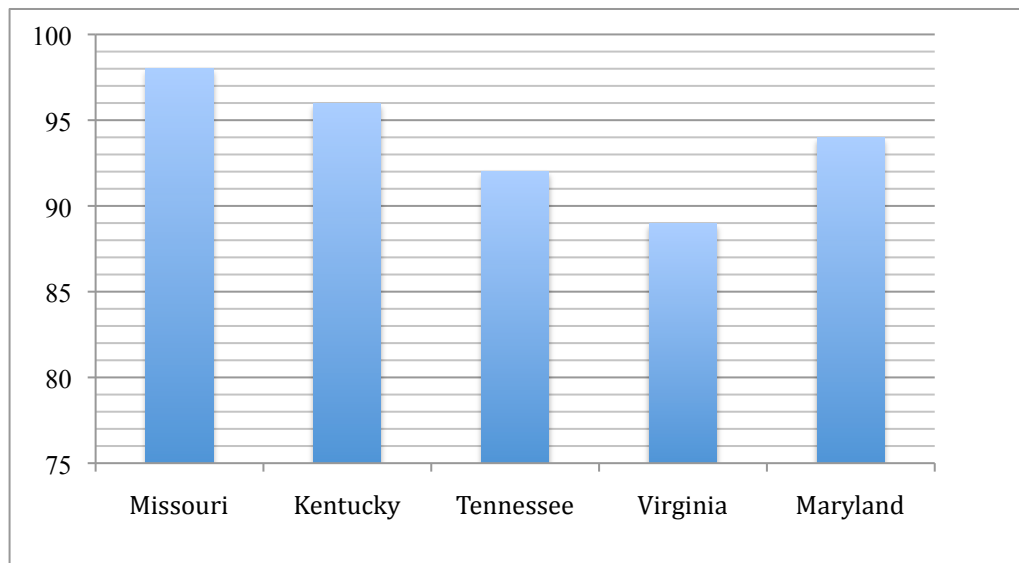
The only significant distinction between slaveholding in this region and slavery elsewhere in the United States (particularly the Lower South) was one of scale. Although census data for the years 1830 to 1850 does not explicitly include the size of slaveholdings, these calculations can easily be figured by examining the 1860 census.⁵ In 1860 a high proportion of slaveholders in the Upper South, particularly in Missouri, owned fewer than twenty slaves. Small-scale slaveholding was clearly dominant in the Upper South by that decade, as the following chart demonstrates.

⁴ The Platte Purchase occurred in 1836 when the United States government purchased additional land on the western Missouri border from the current inhabitants, the Iowa and Sac and Fox tribes. In 1837 this territory was incorporated into Missouri and formed the basis for five counties: Andrew, Atchison, Buchanan, Holt, Nodaway, and Platte. Only Buchanan and Platte counties fall under the scope of this study. For additional information, see Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, Etc.*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 481.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860 Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864). According to the 1860 population census, there were approximately 3,165 slaveholders in the seven western Missouri counties included in this study, with around 14,311 total slaves, a ratio of 4.5 slaves per slaveowner. This was in line with the aggregate data on Missouri as a whole, where the proportion was 4.7 slaves per slaveowner. In other Upper South states with a comparable population, like Maryland, the ratio was similar; for that state, there were an average of 6.3 slaves per slaveholder, although the total slave population in Maryland was smaller than that in Missouri.

This was likely the case in earlier years as well, making clear that the size of these slaveholdings would never rival the system that existed in the Cotton Belt of the Deep South.

Table 2: Percentage of Slaveholders Owning Fewer Than Twenty Slaves, 1860



Information from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Population and Slave Schedules* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864).

Generally speaking, then, small-scale slaveholdings' prevalence meant that slavery in Missouri and Indian Territory took on a different cast than the vibrant plantation complex that developed on cotton, rice, or indigo plantations in the deeper reaches of the South, such as Georgia and Mississippi.⁶ These distinctions were

⁶ My use of the term plantation complex is based on historian Phillip Curtin's definition as laid out in his seminal work, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*. He defined a "mature" plantation complex as a capitalist endeavor and site of specialized agricultural production where the main labor force was the enslaved population; slaveholders controlled bondpeople by adopting "feudal" tactics that gave them some legal jurisdiction. This complex was the result of increasing demands from markets seeking a specialized product (e.g. cotton, rice, etc.). One characteristic of his definition that does not mesh neatly with the slave system in the United States is his assertion that in a plantation complex "political control over the system lay on another continent and in another kind of society," but I would argue that the other elements of this definition accurately describe the plantations that existed

especially marked on the Kansas-Missouri border, since Missouri had “a larger percentage of slaves living on small holdings than any other state in the South” with the exception of Delaware.⁷ This led to a “close proximity,” as Missouri historian Diane Mutti Burke has suggested, that “forced them to interact in countless ways throughout each day and allowed them the extraordinary power to influence one another’s lives.”⁸ An intimate portrait of this border illuminates the striking similarities between this border slaveholding society, which functioned according to the central core assumptions about racial hierarchy and social mores as slavery elsewhere in the Upper South.

Redefining Little Dixie

In addition to placing the Kansas-Missouri border within the larger historiography of Upper South slavery, this chapter will also argue that historians must reevaluate our reigning definitions of Little Dixie. Most scholars employ this term in reference to centers of slaveholding and Southern influence at the heart of Missouri along the Missouri River, which transects the state in a roughly horizontal line, although each definition varies in terms of which counties are included and the criteria for choosing those counties. In 1981 Howard Marshall’s book *Folk Architecture in Little Dixie* focused on Southern cultural transmission and argued that Little Dixie consisted of eight counties in north-central Missouri, with bordering

in the Deep South during the antebellum period. See Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11-13.

⁷ Diane Mutti Burke, “On Slavery’s Borders: Slavery and Slaveholding on Missouri’s Farms, 1821-1865” (Ph. D. diss., Emory University, 2004), 32.

⁸ Burke, 8.

by the fact that public opinion by Missouri residents and journalists has proffered a dizzying array of definitions that illustrate the transitory nature of this term and its multiple meanings across time. Yet, by excluding the border from definitions of Little Dixie, many historians have failed to understand how this slave system adapted itself to life on the frontier.

There is, however, another option: determine its boundaries by making the distinction between a *slave society* and a *society of slaves*, a concept made famous by Ira Berlin's landmark study *Many Thousands Gone*.¹² Even though *Many Thousands Gone* covers an earlier period, both his work and the story of slavery in Missouri have an important commonality: each addresses slavery during what Berlin calls the "charter generation."¹³ One element of these societal shifts was slaveholders' persistent and tenacious commitment to instituting a system of control that would reinforce white superiority and establish hegemonic rule over the enslaved population (an attempt that slaves constantly thwarted in the continued struggle for power).¹⁴ This desire to create a slave society on the border was, as we saw in Chapter 1, an important part of the settlement process in both Kansas and Missouri (although it was

¹² Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, new ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000). Just to be clear, I argue for further inclusion, not exclusion. Although this dissertation only deals with the seven Missouri counties situated on the western border, my conclusion is that Little Dixie *in its entirety* covers counties in the central portion of the state as well as these seven western counties. Thus, my definition does not necessarily exclude the counties that Howard Marshall, Robert Crisler, R. Douglas Hurt, and Diane Mutti Burke use to form their own definitions of the region.

¹³ In his prologue, Berlin distinguishes between a *society with slaves* and a *slave society*, arguing that in a society with slaves "slaves were marginal to the central productive processes; slavery was just one form of labor among many.... In slave societies, by contrast, slavery stood at the center of economic production" (Berlin, 14). Berlin focuses on four regions: the North, the Chesapeake, the low country on the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, and the lower Mississippi Valley. See Berlin, 7, 12.

¹⁴ Berlin, 9.

not ultimately successful in the former case). Berlin's model is not a perfect analogy to the slave system on the border, since like every slave system there are regional differences that dictate a more nuanced assessment, but his precise terms do serve as guides for understanding Little Dixie's boundaries. Thus, I argue that the more populous western Missouri counties such as Buchanan, Platte, and Cass, which are not normally included in many scholars' definition of Little Dixie, do indeed fit the requirements, because those counties saw the creation of a slave society. The pages that follow will trace the growth of this slave society—focusing particularly on the slaves' own experiences and perspective—in order to understand the true nature of slavery on the western frontier.

Agriculture

The most profitable and sustainable form of agriculture was diversified, with farmers growing crops for sustenance as well as for commercial markets. Wheat, corn, or oats could be used to feed one's family and livestock, or they could be bartered for goods at the local general store. As emigrants continued their trek into the Missouri River valley in the late 1820s, farmers turned to two crops cultivated solely for profit: hemp and tobacco. Cotton, the large cash crop commonly associated with the slave system in the Deep South, did not grow well in the harsher climes of the central plains. Hemp, on the other hand, was well suited to the local environment and, more importantly, was commonly grown in Upper South states like Virginia and Tennessee, the very same states that had contributed greatly to the population of

Missouri.¹⁵ After the cotton boom of the early nineteenth century, cotton plantation owners had an increased need for hemp rope to bind their cotton bales; the rise of cotton cultivation therefore necessitated a complimentary increase in hemp agriculture. According to R. Douglas Hurt, in the early years of hemp cultivation the crop could sell for as much as \$170 per ton in Baltimore and \$225 in New York, making distant markets leaders of the industry and tying them to Missouri until western markets matured. As long as prices remained over \$100 per ton, hemp was immensely profitable. However, but the 1840s and 1850s the market was flooded and prices dropped; by the middle of the 1850s hemp cultivated in Missouri could only bring about \$85 per ton in St. Louis.¹⁶

Planters were not always able to earn consistent profits, since hemp cultivation was a time-consuming investment that demanded adherence to high standards of production. Prior to the mechanization of farming, most of this work had to be done by hand, and slaveholders called upon their slaves to furnish that labor. Hemp and slavery came hand in hand. As Stephanie McCurry concluded in her study of South Carolina yeoman households, “the labor of only a few slaves really made a difference in the amount of land a farmer had under cultivation.”¹⁷ Slaves sowed seed, thinned out the seedlings, gathered seed needed for the next season, plowed, hoed, and maintained the fields until August. During the fall harvest, on average each slave could complete one acre per day, using a scythe to cut down hemp stalks that

¹⁵ For additional discussion of hemp cultivation, consult Miles W. Eaton, “The Development and Later Decline of the Hemp Industry in Missouri,” *Missouri Historical Review* 43 (July 1949): 344-59.

¹⁶ Hurt, 105, 121.

¹⁷ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60.

ranged from six to eight feet tall. Through the rest of the autumn months and into the early winter, the hemp was gathered into stacks to dry, and then spread again on the ground so that the woody stems could rot and allow easy access to the fibers within (called the dew-rotting process, the preferred method in Little Dixie).¹⁸ In order to extract those fibers, slaves often used a device called a hemp brake, which had flat wooden boards that pounded the hemp until the fibers separated from the woody stalks. Hemp breaking was extremely difficult and taxing work, providing yet another incentive for planters to use slave labor.¹⁹ When a slave exhibited a special knack for breaking hemp that was a considerable asset. Hemp breaking was a skill sometimes noted in hiring advertisements or sale notices. In 1849 a slave trader in Platte City, G. P. Dorris, placed an advertisement for twenty five of his slaves, stating specifically that there were “hemp breakers” among them.²⁰ Whoever read and responded to this notice most likely did so because they realized that hiring slave labor for the hemp season was a sound investment.

Hemp cultivation bolstered the fledgling economy on the border, becoming a profitable enterprise for many Missouri farmers and their neighbors within Indian Territory. Especially in Clay, Platte, and Buchanan counties hemp was central to the local economy. Special commission houses cropped up throughout Missouri, including one in Liberty (Clay County), and each of these facilitated an easier transfer

¹⁸ Hurt, 109-111; Anne Chiarelli, “A Look at Slavery in Missouri,” *Jackson County Historical Society Journal* 28 (Winter 1986), 13-14.

¹⁹ As historian Jeffrey Stone noted, “Most farmers believed slave labor was very profitable in hemp production. It was difficult to find many whites to work in the harvesting and rotting of hemp because it was hard and dirty work. Like tobacco production, hemp production was a year-round process that took many laborers” (Jeffrey C. Stone, *Slavery, Southern Culture, and Education in Little Dixie, Missouri, 1820-1860* [New York: Routledge, 2006], 26).

²⁰ “Negroes! Negroes!” *Liberty Tribune*, February 16, 1849.

of product to market. Furthermore, commission houses in St. Louis frequently posted advertisements in western counties like Clay and Jackson, promising “to pay the strictest regard to the interests of those favoring him with their Business.”²¹

Tobacco also came to the Kansas-Missouri border alongside Southern emigrants who had previous experience with tobacco cultivation and processing. The New Orleans trade routes extended into the border region, where eager buyers encouraged farmers to raise tobacco that could be sailed down the Mississippi River and sold on the international market. Provided that the tobacco was carefully processed it could sell for between \$3.50 to \$5.50 per hundred pounds in the antebellum period.²²

Like hemp, tobacco cultivation in the Upper South states—especially states like Virginia and Maryland—had been tied closely to the use of slave labor from a very early date. Having been raised in that tradition, Missouri farmers also maintained that slave labor was essential to the tobacco farm’s economic well being, with one slave potentially bringing in nearly \$50 per acre.²³ Slaveowners who could not afford to purchase additional slaves could hire labor for the peak periods of the growing, harvesting, and processing routine. According to local farmers tobacco was superior to other crops, not only because planters benefited from plentiful returns, but also because it had the potential to stimulate the local economy. One newspaper article from Clay County stated that “if the Farmers of Clay would go into the raising of Tobacco extensively it would induce ‘Stemmers’ to locate among us. Glasgow

²¹ “Hemp and Produce Commission House,” *Liberty Tribune*, March 20, 1847.

²² Hurt, 80, 86.

²³ Hurt, 101.

[Chariton County] and Camden [Ray County] are reaping great advantages from their Tobacco Manufactories.”²⁴ Commission men who ran tobacco purchasing houses in major markets like that in New Orleans actively encouraged further tobacco cultivation in Missouri, and some farms even became large-scale commercial farming enterprises.²⁵ By all estimations, tobacco was simply good for business, and what frontier economy would shun a business opportunity? Tobacco cultivation increased throughout this period and would become central to the establishment of slavery in Little Dixie.

Tobacco required a great deal of attention in order for planters to make a noticeable profit, attention that would be provided by slaves and sometimes by the planter himself. As nineteenth-century planters were well aware, tobacco depleted essential nutrients in the soil, and leading scientific agriculturalists of the day agreed that crop rotation, fertilization with manure, and letting fields lay fallow would help farmers continue to gain profitable returns.²⁶ Since diversified agriculture was a defining element of cultivation practices in these western Missouri counties, no doubt many planters maximized their tobacco output in this way. When it was cultivated, tobacco was a labor-intensive crop. The field needed to be plowed and fertilized in January so the crop could be sown in early spring. After planting, slaves would cover the seeds with brush to protect the imminent seedlings from any impending frost.

²⁴ “The Great Depression,” *Liberty Tribune*, September 19, 1846. Chariton County is in central Missouri, while Camden is in Ray County, which shares a border with Clay County.

²⁵ Hurt, 80.

²⁶ Carolyn Merchant, *The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 48-49. For an earlier historical analysis of a different region of the Upper South, see Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860*, new ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006). His work was originally published in 1926.

Once the plants had grown to several inches high they could be replanted into the fields, with watchful slaves hoeing, fighting off insect infestations, weeding out new growth, and topping off the terminal buds. Harvest began in the middle of September. In order to produce the finest leaves, the plants needed to wilt and hang dry, have their stems removed, and be protected from humidity. As soon as the leaves reached the desired color, enslaved workers would pack them into hogsheads, which were barrels that could contain approximately 1,000 pounds. From there the tobacco was ready for shipment.²⁷

In addition to cash crops like tobacco and hemp, slaveholders in Missouri cultivated staple crops that provided food for their families or for trade. Especially during the 1820s and 1830s, white settlement was sparse and subsistence agriculture prevailed since farmers needed to meet their basic needs.²⁸ In particular, Cass County and Bates County both included excellent fertile soil and the earliest white settlers focused their efforts on growing corn, wheat, or oats. Hemp and tobacco were less popular in Cass, Bates, and also Vernon counties, all located south of the modern-day Kansas City metro area. Unlike hemp and tobacco, wheat and corn cultivation was less amenable to slave labor.²⁹ It was not unheard of, however, for some slaveholders to cultivate staple crops. Zadock Martin, a slaveholder and founder of Platte County, had at least four fields of corn, including one near his homestead, one near Weston,

²⁷ Hurt, 99-100.

²⁸ S. L. Tathwell, *The Old Settlers' History of Bates County, Missouri* (Amsterdam, MO: Tathwell and Maxey, 1897), 35.

²⁹ Allen Glenn, *History of Cass County, Missouri* (Topeka: Historical Publishing Company, 1917), 154.

and another in the Missouri River bottoms.³⁰ Other slaveowners, like Smallwood Noland of Jackson County, used slave labor to attend to his large fruit orchards, and likely other slaveholders did the same.³¹

Figure 6: Sketch of Weston Waterfront, Platte County, Missouri

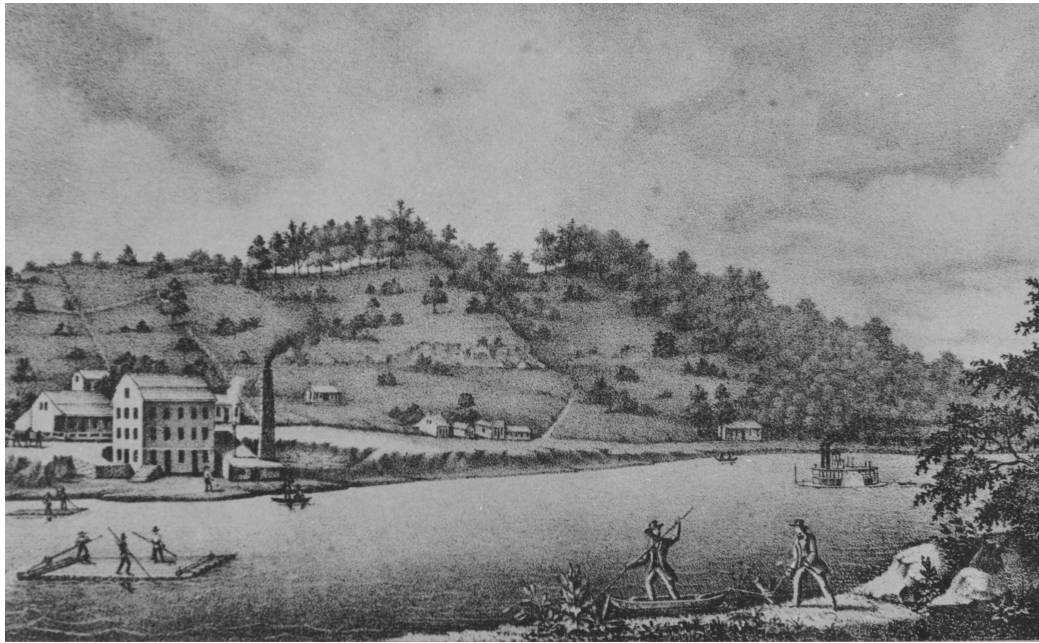


Image courtesy of the Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

Bondspeople who worked on farms spent much of their time working on improvements, such as mending fences, repairing outbuildings such as barns and kitchens, and tending to other errands. The slaves of William C. Connett, who had come to Buchanan County in 1839, built a five-story stone barn to house and process

³⁰ William M. Paxton, *The Annals of Platte County, Missouri* (Kansas City: Hudson Kimberly Publications, 1897), 10.

³¹ Pearl Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers* (Independence: Jackson County Historical Society, 1975), 283.

the hemp crop.³² Of course, since the Kansas-Missouri border was sparsely settled by the time of Missouri's statehood in 1821, slaves also spent a great deal of time breaking up the dense prairie sod and building homes and outbuildings. Zadock Martin, his family, and his slaves had moved to a bluff near the falls of the Platte River in 1828, coming from neighboring Clay County. Martin, his sons, and his slaves built living quarters out of "hewed lynn logs...two shed-rooms were added, making a house of four rooms."³³ James McGee, who had settled in Jackson County in 1828, replaced his first log cabin with a large brick home, constructed with slave labor, which sat near the current intersection of 19th and Baltimore in Kansas City.³⁴

Raising Livestock

Commercial livestock raising was common in Little Dixie, providing a complement to agricultural pursuits. Hogs were particularly important to the welfare of the earliest settlers; according to R. Douglas Hurt, "swine became their chief cash source for paying mortgages and other frontier debts."³⁵ Packed pork could be sold locally for around \$.02 per pound. Once steamboats began plying the Missouri River, farmers could also send their hogs to market "on the hoof," packed in barrels, or in

³² Missouri River Heritage Association, *Heritage of Buchanan County*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1986), 192. County histories such as this often include transcribed recollections collected from other primary sources. Recollections of former slaveowners or their families whitewash the details of their relationship with their slaves, preferring to portray it as a benevolent friendship and themselves as kind masters. This naturally makes their remembrances of personal relationships suspect, but often there are other facts less colored by fond memories. For example, a slaveowner would have no reason to lie about whether or not one of the female slaves did the family's laundry.

³³ Paxton, 10.

³⁴ Wilcox, 258.

³⁵ Hurt, 125.

the form of smoked meat.³⁶ In the early 1850s a farmer might receive between \$3.50 and \$4.50 per hundredweight for packed pork.³⁷ Hogs were also essential for the family's well being, since hogs provided bacon, ham, pork, sausages, and lard. Raising swine consequently became central to farming in the region.

Copying the customs of animal husbandry that existed in the South, farmers on the Kansas-Missouri border let their hogs roam wild throughout the countryside, keeping track of their herd by using notches or holes cut into the pig's ear. While slaves regularly tended to other livestock as part of their daily routine, hogs required almost no care. As butchering season approached, slaves would direct their owner's hogs—which had often acquired a violent temperament—into cornfields to fatten. Sometimes these hogs were far too wild to corral and white farmers, with the help of their slaves, went into the woods to hunt down their stock. Zadock Martin's hogs foraged in the densely overgrown brush along the Kansas River, and "his hog-killing was done with dogs and guns."³⁸

In addition to attending the wild hogs, slaves on the border were responsible for the other livestock, particularly sheep and cattle. Sheep were especially important during the first years of white settlement, since many frontier families depended on wool for their clothing. Unlike hogs, most sheep were kept for family use, not for trade. A. H. F. Payne of Clay County, who owned five slaves in 1840,³⁹ imported

³⁶ Hurt 131, 126-127.

³⁷ Hurt, 129.

³⁸ Paxton, 10-11.

³⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States*, 1840, Population Schedules (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1841).

700 Saxony sheep in 1847 to improve his stock.⁴⁰ With such a large number, his slaves undoubtedly worked alongside Payne during sheep-shearing season.

Business

Although agricultural labor was certainly the lot of many slaves, the slave system in Little Dixie was actually quite diverse. Some slaves' work experiences were predominantly in business. Zadock Martin owned a tavern (which likely operated much like a hotel) in the very early years of white settlement in the region, and after the military built Fort Leavenworth in Indian Territory he operated a large, flat ferry that crossed the Missouri River (a boat that his slaves most likely built).⁴¹

After the overland trails to Oregon and Santa Fe opened up, travelers began to use Westport and Independence as starting points for their westward journeys. Slaves were often at the center of the booming business of outfitting pack trains, assisting families in their covered wagons, and providing other services for the crowds of men, women, and children that flooded these towns on the Missouri border. Both Samuel Owens, one of the most established traders on the Santa Fe route, and his associate Josiah Gregg, were slaveholders who owned several trading centers in the vicinity of modern-day Kansas City. Robert and James Aull ran the Liberty (Clay County) branch of Owen's business, and since the Aull brothers were slaveowners it is likely that they used slave labor on a regular basis. Robert Weston's shop in Independence had several outbuildings, including a wagon shop and plow factory, with much of the

⁴⁰ Hurt, 137.

⁴¹ Paxton, 10, 31.

work being conducted by slaves.⁴² These trading establishments provided a variety of services, including wagon repairs, horse trading, and general merchandise. Among other goods, a traveler could purchase medicine, fabric by the yard, groceries, weapons, books, and whiskey.⁴³

Slave labor also powered other businesses in the region, like Martin Spencer's saw and gristmill located near Weston. Peter Lee, who had been bought by Spencer at the age of seventeen, was the main operator.⁴⁴ Sam Shepherd, an enslaved man in the household of Edwin Hickman, worked at the saw and grist mill that Hickman built in 1847. In addition to the mill's daily business, Shepherd also conducted "considerable repairs" to improve output.⁴⁵ Joseph Robidoux, known as the father of St. Joseph, operated a flour mill at his post. According to the founding documents of Buchanan County, where St. Joseph is located, there were 263 slaves in the county, one of which was Hyponlite, the personal servant of Robidoux. Hyponlite had some responsibility in both the trading post and the mill.⁴⁶ St. Joseph also had a busy wharf, once white settlement in the area increased in the 1840s. Near the river hemp and tobacco warehouses were at the ready to serve this commercial center. Slaves worked at the docks unloading steamboats, carting goods to the warehouses, or doing other miscellaneous tasks necessary to keep business progressing at a rapid place.⁴⁷

⁴² Wilcox, 171.

⁴³ Wilcox, 142-144.

⁴⁴ George Remsburg, "An Interesting Negro Character," *Atchison Daily Globe*, July 12, 1907, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁵ Wilcox, 154.

⁴⁶ Missouri River Heritage Association, *Heritage of Buchanan County*, vol. 1 (Missouri River Heritage Association, 1984), 8.

⁴⁷ *Heritage of Buchanan County*, vol. 1, 12.

Domestic Servants

Other slaves, especially women and children, worked as domestic servants. For the most part, slaveholders on the border adhered to gender conventions when assigning tasks to slaves.⁴⁸ There are some accounts of women working in fields, but most references to female labor place women firmly in the home. Tildy, who worked for the Samuels family of Clay County, Missouri, had a variety of responsibilities as housekeeper. According to the reminiscence of John K. Samuels, her white owner, she “cooked the meals on the old cast iron wood stove, and did the laundry by hand on a copper washboard and copper washtubs.”⁴⁹ Berenice Morrison Fuller, a resident of Jackson County, Missouri, also left a recollection of life on her grandparents’ plantation. Although her reminiscence ignores the harsh aspects of slavery, she does recall the daily activities of some female slaves; enslaved women within the household were responsible for sewing clothes and piecing quilts, and both slave men and women were in charge of the white family’s dairy operation.⁵⁰ At least one of Joseph Park’s female slaves worked as a cook at his home in Indian Territory; in 1848 she was accused of poisoning a small child and “Parks had her sent away at once.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ This gendered division of labor received attention in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

⁴⁹ Chiarelli, 15. Recollections of former slaveowners or their families whitewash the details of their relationship with their slaves, preferring to portray it as a benevolent friendship and themselves as kind masters. This naturally makes their remembrances of personal relationships suspect, but often there are other facts less colored by fond memories. For example, a slaveowner would most likely have no reason to lie about whether or not one of the female slaves did the family’s laundry. These recollections can therefore be useful in establishing basic facts.

⁵⁰ Chiarelli, 15.

⁵¹ Adrienne Christopher, “Captain Joseph Parks: Chief of the Shawnee Indians,” *Westport Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (June 1969), 16.

Another example of these gendered notions of domestic labor is seen in the slave hiring advertisements and notices of sale that appeared in local newspapers. These often refer to the slave's capabilities or skills, in addition to the standard descriptions of their age or physical features. In 1848, a posting from an unknown seller in the *St. Joseph Gazette* offered a twenty-one year old woman and her five month old baby for sale, explicitly stating that "the woman is a good house servant."⁵² Only a few months later, another article appeared in the same newspaper, this time seeking to hire six men and "a Negro Woman who has no children, and is a good house servant."⁵³ These advertisements were usually quite short; the person posting the notice believed that these qualifications were worth mentioning, even given the limited space.

Artisan Trades

In addition to agricultural work, male slaves sometimes had the opportunity to acquire specialized skills and work as apprentices for a tradesman. Bondsmen worked as carpenters, blacksmiths, brick masons, and wheelwrights (among other trades). According to more than one secondhand account in the early twentieth century, the first courthouse in Jackson County, located in Independence, was built out of logs hewed by a local man named Jim Shepherd, who had been hired out to the courthouse's contractor, Daniel P. Lewis.⁵⁴ One of the earliest settlers in Independence, Jones Flournoy, had his slaves build a brick home near the town

⁵² "Negro Woman and Child For Sale," *St. Joseph Gazette*, January 14, 1848.

⁵³ "Negroes Wanted," *St. Joseph Gazette*, March 10, 1848.

⁵⁴ "The Negro Race in History Hereabouts," *Kansas City Star*, July 11, 1912, in Negroes Clippings, vol. 6, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

square (where the Mormon temple stands today). According to a local historian, “they excavated for clay to make bricks. The slaves stacked the sun-dried bricks and piled wood over them to burn. After the bricks were burned and cooled the slaves constructed a four-room brick house with a fireplace in each room. Two rooms were below ground level.”⁵⁵ With Independence and Westport serving as important starting points for overland trails, there was a great demand for skilled wheelwrights and blacksmiths, and in some cases slaves were the ones who provided this service. Independence also had an iron foundry that used slave labor to forge a variety of necessary items like stoves, kettles, yokes, and agricultural implements.⁵⁶

Former slave Hiram Young was born in Tennessee around 1812, and thanks to his skill in carpentry he earned extra money that he diligently saved to purchase his wife Matilda’s freedom, which would make their children free (since a child’s slave status followed that of the mother). After purchasing his own independence Young moved to Liberty in Clay County, Missouri, and then later moved to Independence in Jackson County in 1851, where the manufacture of wagons and oxen yokes was in high demand.⁵⁷ By the end of 1851 he had opened up his own wagon business (with a free African American named Dan Smith). They used hired slaves who received regular wages, and Young eventually gained a reputation as one of the best carpenters

⁵⁵ “Jones H. Flournoy House,” *Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation Newsletter* no. 21-22 (August 1999), 1.

⁵⁶ Wilcox, 179.

⁵⁷ William Patrick O’Brien, “Hiram Young: Pioneering Black Wagonmaker for the Santa Fe Trade” *Gateway Heritage* 14 (Summer 1993): 56-67. According to O’Brien, Young moved to Liberty sometime between 1847 and 1850. See O’Brien, 57.

on the Kansas-Missouri line; reportedly his wagons were widely known in the community.⁵⁸

Community and Family Life

The slave experience on the Kansas-Missouri border was dominated by work, but there was also an active black community and opportunities to bond with family. While the prevalence of small-scale slaveholding could potentially decrease the influence of the slave community, since slaves were more isolated, these men and women still managed to communicate and socialize with slaves on other farms or in towns. Of course, their daily interactions with other African Americans might have been hampered as a result of the sparse settlement patterns that prevailed during the antebellum period.⁵⁹ Enslaved men and women nevertheless formed attachments within their town's neighborhood or on surrounding farms. According to historian Anthony Kaye, "neighborhoods hemmed in and laminated variegated physical and social landscapes. Every neighborhood was a place of kinship as well as discipline, of both work and amusement, of collaboration and strife, of spiritual sojournings and brutal exploitation, of loves and hatreds, of contempt and fellowship, of admiration and indifference, each in myriad forms."⁶⁰ Communal bonds saw slaves through the trials of separation from family, childbirth, and the arduous work of everyday life.

⁵⁸ Lorenzo Johnston Greene, Gary R. Kremer, and Antonio Frederick Holland, *Missouri's Black Heritage*, rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 70. See also William Patrick O'Brien, "Hiram Young: Pioneering Black Wagonmaker for the Santa Fe Trade" *Gateway Heritage* 14 (Summer 1993): 56-67.

⁵⁹ Burke, 12.

⁶⁰ Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5.

As with most sources on slavery, those addressing slaves' community and family lives are tantalizingly brief and many of these are filtered through a white lens. Yet, there are some elements of this slave community that can be pulled to the foreground, illuminating the broader black experience. One example is marriage. As Mutti Burke has concluded, abroad marriages—unions where the man and the woman lived on different farms—were common features of slave life on the border; she argues that “nearly sixty percent of slave families did not reside together on the same farm,” a statistic she calculated from Missouri as a whole.⁶¹ This trend was a side effect of the small-scale slaveholding system since men and women would likely need to look past their home to find a suitable partner. Grace White, who was born into slavery in Missouri and recorded her reminiscence in the 1930s, recalled that her father and mother had an abroad marriage. According to White, “my father was not allowed to come to see my mother but two nights a week. Dat was Wednesday and Saturday.”⁶² Jack, a slave in the household of John C. McCoy, lived in Westport, a bustling town in Jackson County, Missouri, that was situated on the Santa Fe trail. After Jack's wife Rachel died, he married a woman named Jane, who was owned by Hardin Steele, another prominent landowner in the vicinity.⁶³ Hiram Young, who lived first in Liberty and then in Independence, used his carpentry skills to earn extra money to purchase his wife Matilda's freedom, in order to keep their children free (since a child's slave status followed that of the mother). He ultimately became a

⁶¹ Burke, 11.

⁶² Grace E. White, “She Loves Army Man,” August 19, 1937, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves*, vol. 10, *Missouri Narratives* (Washington D.C., 1941), 27.

⁶³ Nellie McCoy Harris, “Memories of Old Westport,” *The Annals of Kansas City* 1, no. 4 (October 1924), 470.

successful black business owner, outfitting wagons heading out on the overland trails.⁶⁴ All of these stories illustrate that enslaved men and women, regardless of their physical proximity to each other, found and maintained contact with their spouse.

Although little is known about the more intimate details of slave marriages and their experiences with courtship, some primary sources at least partially uncover this story. Sometime in the early twentieth century Robert Withers, whose grandfather Abijah Withers had been a slaveholder in Clay County, Missouri, shared some of his family tales about the local slave population with a newspaper reporter. According to Withers' family lore, an enslaved man in the household, George, "was terribly smitten with a girl in town and as soon as he got his supper nearly every night he would hit the path to go see her."⁶⁵ This was a complicated situation because another slave, Ned, was also interested in this woman (her name is unknown). Ned belonged to Dr. W. T. Wood, a man well-known within the community who mentored young doctors and in the course of his medical career had acquired a human skeleton. One morning, after the other slaves began the day's work, George came out to the fields around ten in the morning and spoke with his owner, Abijah. According to George, "Dat no account niggah Dr. Wood's Ned waited 'til I had gone to town last night and den he tuck and hung dat skelpin on a limb of a tree right ovah de path.

⁶⁴ Greene, et. al., 70.

⁶⁵ Robert S. Withers, "'Doctor Wood's Skeleton'... Old Folks Tales," undated, in Withers Family Vertical File, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri (hereafter SHSM).

Ah started home in plenty of time to git da but when ah seed date skelpin ah jess natcheley had to go outn mah way a little to get around het.”⁶⁶

While the details of this story were likely embellished for the white reader’s sake, this account does raise interesting questions. Clearly Robert Withers’ acceptance of racial stereotypes makes this incident out to be an example of how slaves were uneducated, superstitious, and even irresponsible. It is also noteworthy that Withers’ story ends there, with no mention of George’s punishment or lack thereof.⁶⁷ The true particulars may be beyond our reach, but what is interesting is that under the surface several stories are at play.

First, it is clear that George was having some sort of relationship with this woman, although the nature of that relationship is unknown. Not only do we know nothing of this woman’s perspective, but the entire account was filtered through a white lens, which makes it that much more difficult to parse. The frequency of George’s visits (“nearly every night”) implies strongly that he was committed to the relationship; Withers’ account leads us to believe that these two people were not married, but it is certainly possible that they did indeed view each other as husband and wife.⁶⁸ George’s frequent visits may also point to the woman’s interest in

⁶⁶ Robert S. Withers, “‘Doctor Wood’s Skeleton’...Old Folks Tales,” undated, in Withers Family Vertical File, SHSM.

⁶⁷ Like other reminiscences of this period, Withers also begins his account by stating that Missouri slaveholders were always benevolent, and that even when his grandfather was “a little rough” these slaves “recognized his justice and they all loved him.” Both slaveholders and their descendants would often argue that slavery was a benign institution, or at the very least, that some slaveowners treated their slaves well.

⁶⁸ This same issue arises when one considers their ages. Robert Withers’ account refers to George as “a boy” and his sweetheart as “a girl,” but these terms have historically been used to refer to black men and women well into middle age. There is no evidence in the account that testifies to their actual ages.

pursuing the relationship, since she could have discouraged his affections if it were only a casual friendship.⁶⁹

Second, the relationship was apparently public and this love triangle was no secret within the local community, white or black. The fact that Abijah Withers knew part of this back story—and passed it down to his children and grandchildren—points to the fact that white slaveowners had at least limited knowledge of slaves’ romantic relationships. Since Ned was also aware of George’s feelings, to at least some degree, it is likely that the black community in town and in the country had an active communication system.

The third intriguing element of this story is that it provides a glimpse of the relationship between slaveowners and the enslaved. There was a give and take relationship between George and Abijah Withers, at least in Robert Withers’ retelling. As long as the field hands were ready to work each morning, their free time was their own. This meshes well with what historians know about slavery in Missouri, where abroad marriages were the norm, so it is certainly possible that there was an element of negotiation, an implicit understanding that governed the owner-slave relationship. So did the central motif in this story—Ned’s attempt to scare George with the skeleton—really occur? That is anyone’s guess. If nothing else, this story gave George an excuse for coming to work late that morning, an excuse that apparently seemed plausible to Abijah Withers. This may be an example of how George capitalized on his publicized relationship with a girl “in town” and used that story to

⁶⁹ Of course, it could also be true that he did not visit her on each and every trip and instead used that free time for other pursuits, making her his cover if his owner inquired about his whereabouts. There are too many variables to say with certainty that this was or was not the case.

excuse his tardiness.⁷⁰ While this story raises more questions than answers, it nevertheless hints at the true workings of courtship in the slave community. Robert Withers intended for the story to be a humorous diversion for the white readers of the newspaper, when in actuality it is a testament to slaves' agency, as they cleverly played into racial stereotypes to reach their own purposes.

One other component of slaves' family life is even more difficult to discern in the paucity of sources: childhood. Historians of slavery elsewhere in the South have begun to study this phase of life, and while sources are always scarce for this age group the sources on childhood in Indian Territory and Missouri are even less common.⁷¹ It appears that enslaved children began working at a young age. According to one reminiscence left by a white observer, the loss of childhood free time was a difficult transition. Tilly, a young girl, was reportedly heard "talking to herself leaning on her broom. 'How does I hate to sweep de yard an' how I does 'spise to pick up chip.'"⁷² This albeit indirect source illustrates that enslaved children had to grow up quickly. Septimus Scholl, a slaveholder from Kentucky who had emigrated to Jackson County in 1844, promised his seven-year-old grandson Edward, who lived in Kentucky and suffered from a chronic bone disease, "a little black boy to wait on him, to gear his horse and drive his carriage."⁷³ It is likely that Scholl would

⁷⁰ Robert Withers' retelling only refers to the fact that the woman lived "in town," and while that most likely points to Liberty, without knowing the date of the incident there is no way to know which town Withers was referring to, since by the late 1850s and early 1860s there were several other towns in Clay County, Missouri.

⁷¹ An excellent narrative that deals with children's experiences in slavery is Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁷² Chiarelli, 15.

⁷³ Septimus Scholl to Catharine Hinde, June 1847, in Daniel B. Scholl, Septimus Scholl, and D. B. Shull, *A Collection of Letters Written by the Scholl Family and Their Kin, 1836-1897* (St. Louis,

have sent a young male slave close to Edward's age, if he followed through on his promise and Edward did indeed receive a slave as a gift. Margaret Nickens worked in a similar capacity while a young girl. When she was about eight years old she went to live with her owner's daughter Georgia Dawson, who had two young children, and Margaret worked as their nurse. According to Nickens' reminiscence, the patriarch of the family did not believe in holding slaves so the two slaves working in the house (the other was the cook) came from the wife's side of the family.⁷⁴

Slave children likely had some free time for recreation, which in some cases involved forming friendships with white children. However, one interesting story about a young enslaved boy in Independence illustrates how even within these childhood relationships there was a power dynamic that placed white children above enslaved children on the racial hierarchy. Two of Lawrence Flournoy's sons and an unidentified enslaved boy witnessed a hanging in Independence in 1839. After Flournoy, a well-known doctor, signed the death certificate he returned home to find that his two sons had hung the slave boy until he was near death. According to the story, the boys were curious about how it felt to be hung, and they enlisted the black

1959), 23. According to the 1840 census from Clark County, Kentucky, the enslaved members of Septimus Scholl's household were: one male child under ten years; one male between the ages of ten and twenty four; one female child under the age of ten, two females between the ages of ten and twenty four, and one male between twenty four and thirty-six-years old. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States*, 1840, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1841).

⁷⁴ "'Mag' Preaches Thrift," in George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, vol. 11, pt. 7, *Missouri Narratives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 263. Margaret Nickens' interview occurred while she was living in Hannibal, Missouri, close to where her original owner had lived and where she was born. The Dawson family had lived in Clay County on the opposite side of the state adjacent to Indian Territory.

child in their experiment, although they claimed that the boy promised to tell them when he needed to be cut down.⁷⁵

The power dynamic between free whites and enslaved blacks appears here in two key ways. First, the slave boy was the one who faced death or injury in this experiment, and although it is unclear whether his involvement was coerced or if he willingly agreed (which is unlikely), the fact remains that the white children were those who had absolute control over the situation. His life was quite literally in their hands. Second, like most children who are in trouble with their father, it is possible that these two white boys completely misrepresented their intentions. They may have been curious about what it felt like to be hung, and tortured this enslaved boy in their attempt to understand the meaning of death. While the particulars are not clear to us today, there is no doubt that this enslaved boy was traumatized by the experience; he surely suffered some physical after effects, or perhaps even died as the result of his injuries. This incident was also a cruel reminder that he had very little control over his own body, a sad foreshadowing of his future experiences as an enslaved adult. Even in childhood, black boys and girls faced constant reminders that they were not deemed equal to their white peers.

Threat of Separation

One thread of the slave experience that also dominated life on the Kansas-Missouri border was the threat of separation from family and other loved ones. Just like slaves who lived elsewhere in the South, most slaves in this region faced

⁷⁵ Wilcox, 152.

impending separation and ensuing feelings of loneliness or abandonment at more than one point in their life. On only a moment's notice slaves could be sold to pay the white owner's debts, hired out, or sent to live with relatives of the white family. Septimus Scholl wrote many letters to his son-in-law, Rodney Hinde, and this correspondence provides insight into slaves' separations. In a letter dated January 1, 1849, Scholl described where his slaves were living: Kit, Betty, and Jane were all living at his daughter Eliza's house, Bob was with his son Nelson, Evaline was "at town" (probably hired out), and the remaining slaves stayed at home.⁷⁶ Since these five slaves were still living within the extended white family, it is very likely that they were able to see each other on a regular basis, but the fact remains that they were not living together.

Informal arrangements like that of the Scholl family were not uncommon. Margaret Nickens was separated from her mother when she went to live with the Dawson family in Clay County, which was several days' travel from her home in Monroe County. Her memories of their farewell exemplify the sadness that prevailed in these situations, when enslaved parents could not change their children's fate. According to Nickens, "when we was fixing to leave, dere was lots of people standing 'round. My mother had to stand dere like I wasn't her's and all she could say was, 'Be a good girl, Margaret.'"⁷⁷ Recalling their parting was clearly an emotional experience for Nickens.

⁷⁶ Septimus Scholl to Rodney Hinde, January 1, 1849, in Scholl, et. al., 29. In a letter dated April 8, 1849, Scholl stated that Evaline was hired out. Often hiring contracts began on New Year's Day, so it is likely that Evaline had been in town since the beginning of the year.

⁷⁷ "Mag Preaches Thrift," in Rawick, ed., vol. 11, pt. 7, 263.

In addition to informal sharing and hiring out, slaves had to deal with separation caused by their owner's death, which often led to a division of the assets (with slaves grouped alongside physical property). After Septimus Scholl's death on August 11, 1849, his slaves found themselves at the mercy of the courts and Septimus' heirs. Kit's oldest child, of unknown age or gender, was sold to Eliza per Septimus' instructions. Three slaves were later hired out until the estate could be finalized. Harriet, who had remained at home for much of this period, went to Septimus' widow, for the cost of \$25. Milly and her child went to a neighbor, Kit and her son were sent to John Wallace's homestead, and the remaining slaves were hired out to pay off Septimus' debts.⁷⁸ A resident of Buchanan County, Missouri, William Williams, stipulated in his will that his wife Esther have "during her natural life or widowhood her choice of the slaves."⁷⁹ His remaining slaves and livestock (which he grouped together) were to be divided among his children. Similarly Murdoch McPherson of Jackson County stipulated in his will that his slave Louisa should go to his daughter Nancy Johnson, that Louisa's daughter Mary should go to his other daughter, Martha Ann, and that Louisa's son Nelson live with Daniel McPherson, one of Murdoch's two sons.⁸⁰ As was common in a slave system, a slaveowner's death could thrust slaves into a state of turmoil.

⁷⁸ Nelson Scholl to Rodney Hinde, February 3, 1850, in Scholl et. al., 38-39.

⁷⁹ William Williams, Last Will and Testament, August 18, 1846, in Buchanan County Probate Court Records, Wills and Administrations, 1839-1857, Midwest Genealogy Center, Independence (hereafter MGC).

⁸⁰ Murdoch McPherson, Last Will and Testament, August 4, 1851, in Jackson County Probate Court Records, Wills and Administrations, 1831-1865, MGC. Murdoch's other son, William, received money to help support him, since William was "unable to provide or take care of himself."

On the border, as elsewhere in the Upper South, a slave family might also be broken up due to sale. Slaveholders saw slaves as property, and most had no qualms about selling human property in the same way that one would sell livestock or household possessions. Jerry Myer's reminiscence, recorded in 1940, testifies to the common fear of being sold, with little or no hope of being reunited with loved ones. He called to mind "that scenes of Negroes chained together and sold like cattle at the auction block are still vivid in his mind. He recalls particularly the day his spirited mother was sold to a half-breed from Wyandotte" (in Indian Territory).⁸¹ The reasons for her sale are unknown, although his description of her as "spirited"—a feature slaveowners would have found troubling—may hint at a possible explanation. A slave who showed spirit had the potential to stir up trouble and dissent within the slave ranks, a situation that slaveowners hoped to avoid at all costs.

Most enslaved women who had young infants were not separated from a child who was still nursing. For instance, an 1848 notice in the *St. Joseph Gazette* (published in Buchanan County) listed "a NEGRO WOMAN and child, the former 21 years of age, and the latter 5 months old, will be sold on accommodating terms. The woman is a good house servant, and is perfectly sound and healthy. For particulars enquire at this office."⁸² The advertisement provides little information about this young woman, so the reader can only speculate as to whether or not she had other children or loved ones that she was forced to leave behind.

⁸¹ Jim Rell, "Once Offered \$800 for Me, Says Negro Corn Grower," *Topeka Capital*, September 1940, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Slave sales will be discussed in greater detail elsewhere in the dissertation.

⁸² "Negro Woman and Child for Sale," *St. Joseph Gazette*, January 14, 1848.

The most permanent form of separation from loved ones was death. For both enslaved blacks and white settlers living on the border, the threat of disease, fatal accidents, or violence made death an ever-present force in everyday life. Diseases like cholera made no distinction between free and slave, so when a frightening cholera epidemic swept through the border region in 1849 the slave community was hard hit. Although William H. Harris's retelling of this epidemic's effect on Westport only describes how white settlers responded to the dire situation, it can be inferred that members of the black community had similar reactions. According to Harris, "deaths occurred so rapidly it seemed for a time the entire population was doomed. People sickened and died within a few hours; few families were spared and some were completely wiped out."⁸³ Jabez Smith, Jackson County's largest slaveholder, reportedly lost between 100 to 200 of his slaves during this outbreak, and according to Doctor Leo Twyman the first case in the county was in fact "a vigorous and previously healthy negro man, the property of Jabez Smith."⁸⁴ Other lethal diseases were also common during the antebellum period, on the border as in the rest of the United States. In 1847 Missouri slaveowner Septimus Scholl lamented the death of Peter, a young enslaved boy who had contracted measles.⁸⁵ Scholl's letter mentioning Peter's death may have been motivated by Scholl's personal sadness, or simply by his displeasure at losing a financial asset; regardless, Peter's family surely felt his loss much more deeply.

⁸³ William H. Harris, "A Brief History of Old Westport," *Kansas City Genealogist* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2004), 117. This was originally published in a 1933 issue of the *Kansas City Star*.

⁸⁴ Annette W. Curtis, *Jackson County, Missouri in Black and White*, vol. 2 (Independence: self published, c. 1992), 1.

⁸⁵ Septimus Scholl to Rodney Hinde, October 19, 1847, in Scholl et. al., 24.

In addition to fatal illnesses, slave families also dealt with deaths caused by accidents. In another letter to his son-in-law, Scholl described a seriously injured “little negro boy of Kit’s four or five months old which fell out of his mother’s lap [into the fire], she being asleep, and is so badly burned very little hope of recovering, the burn entirely [covering] his face.”⁸⁶ The child, whose name is never given, only lived for two more weeks.⁸⁷ Kit had lost another child only eighteen months prior (the same Peter mentioned in the preceding paragraph); although Kit’s personal reactions are not preserved in the historical record, there is no doubt that she struggled to overcome the grief caused by two children’s deaths in such rapid succession.

Religious Instruction

Slave communities dealt with death and disease on a regular basis (as did the white community), but these communities also served as meeting places for recreation and social gatherings. One powerful force in these neighborhoods was the church. Although most of the slaves’ waking hours were consumed with work, for some slaves there was also time set aside for religious instruction. In frontier settlements during the antebellum period, most churches began as home gatherings; if a slaveowner supported slaves’ Christian education and opened up their home for the service, then the slaves within that household would most likely have been included in these services (at least to some degree). Some church meetings, however, were segregated. According to one white woman’s reminiscence of an early meeting at a

⁸⁶ Septimus Scholl to Rodney Hinde, January 1, 1849, in Scholl et. al., 28.

⁸⁷ Septimus Scholl to Rodney Hinde, April 8, 1849, in Scholl et. al., 30.

schoolhouse in Westport, there was a separate “part of the house reserved for the servants.”⁸⁸ Slaveholders’ attitudes could vary greatly across the spectrum, from complete indifference to a steadfast commitment to educating slaves about God’s mandates for racial hierarchy.

Throughout the antebellum South, slaveowners used their interpretations of scripture as a justification of slavery and attempted to impose these beliefs on the local slave population as a way to undermine acts of resistance and keep a firm lid on attitudes they deemed rebellious. Slaves, on the other hand, embraced the egalitarian message of the New Testament and formed their own approach to Christian life. In Missouri, as in other Upper South states, slaveowners attempted to counteract this practice by passing laws that restricted slaves’ movements and their access to black-sponsored church meetings. Placing limits of slaves’ mobility was a central component of slaveholders’ attempts to assert hegemonic control over the enslaved population. For instance, in 1847 the state legislature passed a law stating that “no meeting or assemblage of negroes or mulattoes, for the purpose of religious worship, or preaching, shall be held or permitted where the services are performed or conducted by negroes or mulattoes, unless some sheriff, constable, marshal, police officer, or justice of the peace, shall be present.”⁸⁹ Law enforcement, whether formally or informally, also had the power to “suppress” these meetings. Undoubtedly slaves found ways around this, and the law was most likely enforced

⁸⁸ Harris, “Memories of Old Westport,” 469.

⁸⁹ “An Act Respecting Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes,” February 16, 1847, in *Laws of the State of Missouri, Passed at the First Session of the Fourteenth General Assembly* (Jefferson City: James Lusk, 1847), in Blacks in Missouri History (pre-1866) Vertical File, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri (hereafter SHSM).

sporadically, but its passage nevertheless points to slaveowners' fears that Christianity's message would ultimately inflame black passions and lead to resistance.

The exceptions to this paucity of religious buildings were the Indian missions that existed along the border during the early years of white American settlement. Bates County, which was only sparsely settled, had a Presbyterian mission to the Osage, called Harmony Mission, that was active until 1838. The most famous mission on the border was the Shawnee Methodist Mission across from Westport in Indian Territory, where Thomas Johnson's family held a number of slaves. At this lively mission there were frequent Sabbath church services, with the native schoolchildren, some of their parents, and some slaves in attendance.⁹⁰ In 1843 there were at least ten black children listed as members of the mission.⁹¹ By 1848 there were at least three black members of the church, with that number remaining steady through the Bleeding Kansas period.⁹² It is not clear who these slaves were—or if this number is entirely accurate—but based on the Methodists' desire to convert unbelievers it is likely that some slaves were among their parishioners.

Social Gatherings

In addition to church meetings, slaves assembled in other social gatherings. When a slaveowner planned a festive celebration, slaves were expected to take a

⁹⁰ Belle Greene, "Life at Shawnee Mission," *The Annals of Kansas City* 1, no. 4 (October 1924), 457. Belle Greene grew up at the Shawnee Mission and Manual Labor School in Indian Territory, where her mother was an instructor.

⁹¹ Martha B. Caldwell, *Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School*, 2nd ed. (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1977), 50.

⁹² Caldwell, 65.

leading role in the preparation process; however, this could also be an opportunity to socialize with slaves on neighboring farms, who might be brought along to help out with the planning or with the party itself. One white woman's description of the young settlement at Westport illustrates the attention to detail and the time-consuming work that went into the most lavish parties. One particularly onerous task was food preparation. She wrote that "turkey and hams, chickens, roast pig, saddle of mutton and sometimes venison and buffalo were served.... In the center of each table was placed a large stack of pyramid cake, and sometimes one at each end."⁹³

Although no reminiscences refer directly to slaves' involvement in preparations, it is unlikely that slaveowners would not take advantage of slave labor in these situations.

Slaves did not partake in these activities to the same degree as whites—since slaveowners made clear that these parties were for the benefit of the white community—but slaves could occasionally hold their own celebrations. Some of these gatherings took place without a slaveowner's approval. One family history detailed how Wilhelm Kroll, a German immigrant who settled in the Kansas City area in 1853, rented the top floor of his business for one such party. According to the story passed down by Kroll's family, "one young slave girl, attending, evidently without her master's permission, was there. During the evening, the girl's master entered the hall with a blacksnake whip, which he proceeded to use on the poor girl."⁹⁴ At this point Kroll intervened on the girl's behalf, as the story goes, and apparently he continued to let the local black community hold functions there until

⁹³ Harris, "A Brief History of Old Westport," 116.

⁹⁴ Ruth Cochran, "Wilhelm Kroll's Narrative," 1967, in Robert M. Snyder Jr. Collection, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri—Kansas City (hereafter WHMC—KC).

the building was later destroyed by fire.⁹⁵ This event may have been an aberration, in terms of the party's location, but it nevertheless illustrates how slaveholders worked actively to restrict slaves' access to each other. Just like white concerns over all-black church services, any social function that drew a crowd of slaves (and also free blacks) could be a breeding ground for dissention. Like the unnamed slaveowner in this story, other slaveowners were usually concerned with restricting slaves' involvement in social gatherings. An ordinance in Independence prohibited slaves from gathering on the streets and sidewalks, and if a large group of slaves chose to ignore this regulation they may be detained in the jail until their owner paid the fine. These slaves also faced physical punishment, since slaveowners did not appreciate having to pay such fines.⁹⁶

Physical Needs

Another facet of slave life that in many ways reflected the system existing elsewhere in the Upper South was the slaves' physical condition; that is, their housing arrangements, clothing, and access to medical care. Historians have argued that slaves in Missouri were often in close contact with the white family, thanks to the nature of small-scale agriculture. According to Eugene Genovese, "the argument for the greater humanity of the small slaveholders turned, to a great extent, on the fact of greater intimacy, of rough camaraderie, and of mutual sympathy born in common

⁹⁵ Ruth Cochran, "Wilhelm Kroll's Narrative," 1967, in Robert M. Snyder Jr. Collection, WHMC—KC.

⁹⁶ Wilcox, 188.

quarters.”⁹⁷ When the entire unit (including both whites and blacks) only had one house, slaves would then live inside the house alongside the white family. This was especially true in the case of house servants, who were expected to be at their owner’s beck and call, even at odd hours of the night. According to Howard Marshall’s study of Little Dixie architecture, domestic slaves often lived in the main house, usually in an attic space or in a loft above the kitchen.⁹⁸ Genovese’s point may have been true in some cases—some slaveholders may have expressed greater compassion after being so intimately connected to their slaves—but close quarters could also cause additional problems for enslaved men, women, and children. Diane Mutti Burke’s study of Missouri slavery points out that this close physical proximity also had the potential to foster additional abuse (especially that of a sexual nature), since slaves in these situations had little to no privacy, making it that much more difficult for them to resist the bonds of enslavement.⁹⁹ In either of these cases, the quality of life for Missouri’s slaves was determined in many ways by the relationship to the white slaveholder, as evidenced by the vagaries of individual experiences.

This is not to say that slaves never lived apart from their owner with some degree of independence. In Jackson County Jabez Smith, who at his death owned multiple farms spanning 3,470 acres and 311 slaves, had slave cabins built on each farm.¹⁰⁰ His main farm in Independence had a large neighborhood of slave cabins

⁹⁷ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 9.

⁹⁸ Marshall, 11. Marshall includes photos of houses with these slaves’ living quarters in the “big house,” although the examples are not from the border region. For one example see the central-hall house depicted on p. 58.

⁹⁹ Burke, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Curtis, 1.

known locally as “Nigger Hill.”¹⁰¹ Zadock Martin, in Platte County, reportedly had “shed-rooms” added onto his log house, which could have served as slaves’ housing during their first few years on the border. However, at some point he did order the construction of slave “cabins scattered around on his lands.”¹⁰² Judging from photographs of surviving slave quarters elsewhere in Missouri, it is likely that these cabins were of varying quality.

Like slaves’ living arrangements, their clothing varied according to the white owner’s income and his or her inclination to provide adequate protection from the elements. One way to understand slaves’ typical wardrobe is to examine runaway advertisements, which often describe in detail the runaway’s appearance. John, who ran away from Isaac Neff’s farm in Clay County, was wearing “brown jeans pants, and red flannel shirt” in late January. These were not enough to adequately protect him from the winter cold, although it is of course possible that Isaac Neff’s description was not accurate, and John had stolen or otherwise procured a coat and hat.¹⁰³ In 1848 Joseph Parks, a leader of the Shawnee and resident of Indian Territory, posted the following description from Westport: Stephen had escaped on Saturday night and “has various kinds of clothing; a low black fur hat, and a blue blanket coat.”¹⁰⁴ Runaway notices such as these can hint at the circumstances surrounding slaves’ decisions to escape, but there are also variables that cannot be

¹⁰¹ Wilcox, 191.

¹⁰² Paxton, 10.

¹⁰³ “One Hundred Dollars REWARD!” in General Collections, Jackson County (Mo.) Historical Society and Archives, Independence (hereafter JCHS).

¹⁰⁴ “\$150 Reward,” *Liberty Tribune*, June 2, 1848.

accounted for, such as whether or not they owned these clothes, stole them from the white family, or borrowed them from sympathetic black neighbors.

Of course from the perspective of a slaveholder, who saw slaves as property and investments, caring for slaves' basic well being promised financial returns. One crucial aspect of this investment was the physical health of one's slaves; sick or injured slaves would not be able to work and would consequently hurt the slaveowner's opportunities for income. There were surely moments where slaveowners genuinely cared for their slaves and wanted them to receive prompt medical care, but in a coercive labor system slaves were nevertheless seen as property. Some records of medical care have survived. John Hambright's personal papers include accountings of money paid out to a physician named Thornton Thriller. In 1852, Hambright paid for at least seventeen doctor visits for enslaved women and children on his farm, and in fourteen of those instances the doctor provided medicine.¹⁰⁵ The average cost per visit was a little over two dollars, or about sixty dollars in today's currency.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately the accounting does not describe the nature of their illness or injuries, or the slaves' names, except for the entry on August 19 when the doctor tended to an enslaved woman's blister. According to receipts filed in the estate papers of Richard Fristoe, his administrators had called a doctor to care for Peter, who required medicine, and for a "Negro girl," who became ill (or

¹⁰⁵ Colonel John H. Hambright in Acc. With Thornton Thriller, 1852, in John Hambright Papers, JCHS. This is the number for visits where the account explicitly states "visit for Negro Child" or something similar. The accounting did include other entries that may have referred to slaves, but these were unclear.

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Purchasing Power of Money in the United States from 1774 to 2008," *MeasuringWorth*, <http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/> (accessed June 15, 2009). This website, created by two economists, provides a calculator to compare the purchasing power of the U.S. dollar. To recreate this calculation, input "1852" as the initial year, "2" as the dollar amount, and "2008" as the desired year. The result will be \$57.49, which is an approximation.

worsened) in the middle of the night and needed attention.¹⁰⁷ The specific illnesses were not mentioned in either case. At that time the Fristoe estate owned at least twelve slaves.¹⁰⁸

His estate papers also contain an intriguing (yet brief) reference to one of the female slaves affected by the distribution of assets. In 1848 his administrators paid “Sarah Younger for services to Slave,” according to the estate account book.¹⁰⁹ Miscellaneous papers related to the estate also include a small receipt that reads as follows: “Received of John Smith, Administrator of the Estate of Richard Fristoe, Deceased, two dollars & fifty Cents for Services Rendered to Black woman belonging to Said Estate this 26 Day April 1848. Sarah Younger.”¹¹⁰ The most viable explanation for this is that Younger was a midwife, or was in some way assisting with another gynecological problem (perhaps a complication of childbirth). At that time the only three women of childbearing age were Priscilla (41 years old), Martha (23 years old), and Ellen (19 years old). In the first estate inventory, taken in 1845, each of them was listed as having at least one child.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Joanna Chiles Eakin, ed., “Richard Fristoe: Administration of His Estate in 1848” *Kansas City Genealogist* 38, no. 1 (Summer 1998), 27, 29. Like many of the other articles in this magazine, this is a transcription of archival sources.

¹⁰⁸ The inventory taken in April 1849 only lists eleven slaves, but the account book from 1848 notes that Peter was sold. Two of the other slaves mentioned in the 1845 inventory, Dealey and Juley, were no longer with the family in 1849. It is possible that they died or were hired out. There is no record of their sale but that is a third possibility.

¹⁰⁹ Eakin, 23.

¹¹⁰ Eakin, 27.

¹¹¹ Eakin, 22. This would mean that Ellen became pregnant with her first child at a young age, if her estimated age is close to being accurate. In 1845 she would have been around fifteen or sixteen.

Slave Sales

The interstate slave trade existed on the border, although on a smaller scale than the large slave markets in cities like New Orleans or St. Louis (the closest large market). One of the cruelest aspects of the slave system was whites' belief that slaves were property that could be evaluated according to the same terms as one would evaluate cattle or other livestock. In a slaveholder's eyes a slave was merely a commodity, and as with all commodities, enslaved individuals were assigned a monetary value.¹¹²

There were several financial reasons behind a slaveholder's decision to sell his or her slave property, but all of these had the same result for the enslaved individual: separation from one's familiar surroundings and the slave community (varying to some degree based on the specifics of the sale). A common justification for slaves' sale was to divide the assets of a deceased slaveowner's estate. Often slaveholders left wills that dictated where their slave property should be distributed, or their administrators attended to that themselves, but in other instances the slaves faced the auction block instead of being divided among the deceased's heirs. In 1852 Permelia Jackson and her guardian informed her siblings that four of their father's slaves—Bets, Sean, William, and Frances—would be sold “for the purpose of distribution amongst us.”¹¹³ With seven heirs and four slaves, there was no other means for an equal division, making it necessary for the “proceeds of said sale be

¹¹² Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 17, 19.

¹¹³ Permelia Jackson and Nat Coffman (guardian), to Lafayette Jackson, Isaac Jackson, and Sue Ann Jackson, et. al., November 22, 1852, in Jackson County Court Records, General Collections, JCHS. All of the children including Permelia were minors and had appointed guardians. The other family slaves had gone to her mother, Sarah Jackson.

divided amongst your petitioner [Permelia] and the said other children.”¹¹⁴ The slaves’ reactions to this impending sale are not known, but one can surmise that they were distraught at the prospect of being sent away from home to enter an unfamiliar situation. In 1846 Peter Writesman, the administrator of John Writesman’s estate, posted a notice in the *Liberty Tribune* requesting a court “order for the sale of the slave or slaves belonging to the estate of John Writesman, deceased, for the purpose of making distribution of the proceeds accruing therefrom among the heirs and legal representatives.”¹¹⁵ In the 1840 census, John Writesman was listed as unmarried with no children, and he owned one male slave between the ages of twenty four and thirty six.¹¹⁶ Ultimately a slaveowner’s death was the most common reason for slave sale, not only because the slaveholder’s will or administrator dictated such a sale in order to distribute assets more easily, but also because the deceased sometimes left debts that needed to be repaid.

Slaves also found themselves on the auction block for reasons that were not publicly disclosed in newspaper advertisements. It is possible that the administrators of estates did not want to publicize the deceased’s financial difficulties. An advertisement in an 1847 issue of the *Liberty Tribune* stated that a twenty year-old female slave who belonged to Peyton Y. G. Bartee’s estate would be sold to the highest bidder.¹¹⁷ The reasons for her sale are unclear to us today, and they may have

¹¹⁴ Permelia Jackson v. Lafayette Jackson and others, Petition for Sale of Slaves, in Jackson County Court Records, General Collections, JCHS.

¹¹⁵ “Notice,” *Liberty Tribune*, November 21, 1846.

¹¹⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States*, 1840, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1841).

¹¹⁷ “Negro Girl at Public Sale,” *Liberty Tribune*, August 14, 1847. In the 1840 census Bartee’s household consisted of eleven white residents and one male slave under the age of ten. Bartee must

been unclear to her at the time. Doubtless her sale would have been a traumatic experience fraught with uncertainty.

Although sale prices and values appear in slaveholders' financial records (and occasionally in newspaper advertisements), these statistics can be misleading. A slave's monetary worth was determined by his or her fitness for work, physical strength, age, and sex; however, these facts were not always cited accurately, making comparison difficult. Historian Harrison Trexler has concluded that there was a rise in slave prices during this period before the Civil War, which rings true based on these statistics and on anecdotal evidence, but other conclusions are harder to come by.¹¹⁸ At the very least estates like Richard Fristoe's can provide points of reference. The first inventory of his estate, most likely conducted in 1845, lists eight slaves according to gender, name, and value; eleven of those same individuals appear in the 1849 inventory. Each of the three adult women was listed jointly with a child in 1845. It is likely that these children were too young to be separated from their mother and were consequently considered a package deal. If this is the case, in at least this particular instance, Fristoe and his administrators sought to keep family groups together.

Other notes filed alongside the inventory may further strengthen this conclusion. Nancy Campbell, one of Polly's children, received Ellen and Lewis; although the note is undated, Ellen would have been in her late teens and Lewis was a

have acquired this slave after the 1840 census, or perhaps the census taker made a mistake. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States*, 1840, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1841).

¹¹⁸ Harrison Trexler, "The Value and the Sale of the Missouri Slave," *Missouri Historical Review* 8, no. 2 (January 1914), 69.

Table 3: Estimated Values of Richard Fristoe's Slave Property, 1845-1849

Slave Name	Sex	Age in 1845	Value in 1845	Age in 1849	Value in 1849
Cordelia	F	7	--	11	\$250
Dealey	F	--	\$200	--	--
Elizabeth	F	--	--	3	\$150
Ellen	F	15	\$500 (w/child)	19	\$500
Henry	M	1	--	5	\$175
Isora	F	--	--	2	\$125
Jacob	M	43	\$350	47	\$400
Juley	F	--	\$25	--	--
Julian	M	5	--	9	\$200
Lewis	M	--	--	3	\$175
Martha	F	19	\$500 (w/child)	23	\$500
Peter	M	--	\$500	--	--
Pricilla	F	37	\$250 (w/child)	41	\$200
Susan	F	3	\$150	7	\$200

Information from Joanna Chiles Eakin, ed., "Richard Fristoe: Administration of His Estate in 1848" *Kansas City Genealogist* 38, no. 1 (Summer 1998), 27-29.

toddler. Mary A. Tally, another heir, received Martha (in her early twenties), Susan (between ages three and seven), and possibly other slaves (the note's punctuation makes it difficult to interpret). Both of these appear to be family groupings, once again implying that Fristoe's administrators did indeed care about the black nuclear family to at least some degree.¹¹⁹ This does not, of course, imply that the harsh realities of life as a slave could be entirely mitigated, but it does illustrate that the slave-master relationship was a complicated (and nuanced) one.

Of course, some slaves were able to stay connected with their family or kin;

William H. Stratton of Bates County dictated in his will that he wished for his slaves

¹¹⁹ Eakin, 27. This note also mentions Ann, who appears to have been a slave (but was not in either inventory), and "Izara," which is likely a corruption of the name Isora, who was listed in the 1849 inventory as being two years old.

to be divided among his nieces and nephews, “and that none of my said slaves be sold.” If his nieces and nephews had not reached the age of majority at the time of his death, “the said slaves of which I may be possessed at my death shall be hired out for the benefit of said children.”¹²⁰ Hiring out was more temporary than sale, but the prospect of being separated from loved ones surely lingered in the minds of the slaves who would be affected by Stratton’s death.¹²¹

Enslaved women and their infants were usually sold together, a practice that was also common elsewhere in the Upper South. In some cases slaveholders may have made this decision out of compassion, but slave traders and slaveholders were nothing if not practical; until a child could be weaned there would be no point in separating him or her from the mother. Of course, this did not keep older children from being torn from loved ones. In St. Joseph Morgan Dryden, the administrator of George Grimes’ estate, offered a thirty-four year old female slave and her seven month old baby “to be sold together,” but “a Likely Boy 11 years old, and a Girl 8 years old” went up for sale at the same time, with no apparent stipulation that they be kept together.¹²² The historical record does little to shed light on the reasons behind their sale, but the 1840 census notes that George Grimes of Clay County owned six slaves, and the age distribution shows that the only woman of childbearing age in 1840 (seven years before this sale) was between the ages of twenty four and thirty six. There is no way to be sure that all the children listed on the census (three boys and

¹²⁰ William H. Stratton, Last Will and Testament, May 7, 1843, in Bates County Probate Court Records, Will Book A, Midwest Genealogy Center, Independence (hereafter MGC).

¹²¹ William H. Stratton, Last Will and Testament, May 7, 1843, in Bates County Probate Court Records, Will Book A, MGC.

¹²² “Sale of Negroes,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, March 5, 1847. This administrator was a resident of Buchanan County, which is why slaves from Clay Co. appeared for sale in St. Joseph.

one girl) were this woman's offspring, but it is a distinct possibility, the implication being of course that while this woman and her nursing infant remained together, she was separated from two of her other children.¹²³

Slave sale advertisements in local newspapers did not always explicitly state that the mother and child would be sold together, perhaps because stating the slaves' ages made such a caveat unnecessary. An 1848 notice in the *St. Joseph Gazette* listed "a NEGRO WOMAN and child, the former 21 years of age, and the latter 5 months old, will be sold on accommodating terms. The woman is a good house servant, and is perfectly sound and healthy. For particulars enquire at this office."¹²⁴ The wording of this particular notice is slightly ambiguous, unless one assumes that the typical nineteenth century reader would surmise that these two slaves would be sold together. In any case, the advertisement ran for nearly eight months, implying that no one had inquired or, at the very least, none had offered a price that seemed suitable to the slave owner.

On occasion slaves faced an impending sale after a court ruling. On December 1, 1847, the sheriff of Buchanan County put up for sale "one NEGRO GIRL named MARTHA, a slave for life," to be sold on the courthouse steps in St. Joseph. The notice in the local newspaper said only that she was "now in the hands

¹²³ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States*, 1840, Population Schedules (Washington, D. C., 1841). The census lists the following: two male slaves under the age of ten, one female slave under the age of ten, one male between ten and twenty four, one female between twenty four and thirty six, and one male aged between thirty six and fifty five. At first glance this may appear to be a nuclear family grouping, but that is of course speculation. Grimes may have acquired additional slaves between 1840 and 1847.

¹²⁴ "Negro Woman and Child for Sale," *St. Joseph Gazette*, January 14, 1848.

of Dugan Fouts the defendant in the above cause, and Abraham Enyart is plaintiff.”¹²⁵

The circumstances surrounding her sale are unknown; since the decree came from the Circuit Court of Chancery, which handled lawsuits (among other things), it is possible that her sale came about as a way to resolve a business or family dispute that could not be settled in the regular courts. Regardless, Martha’s fate lay in the hands of her white owner.¹²⁶

Interstate Slave Trade

Each of these instances involved the local slave trade on the micro-level, but there is also evidence that the interstate slave trade existed on the border, linking western Missouri and Indian Territory to St. Louis and New Orleans markets. Slave traders from St. Louis, such as Corbin Thompson, posted advertisements in newspapers throughout the state, including the *Western Journal of Commerce* printed in Kansas City. Other traders kept their main offices in towns like St. Joseph, where the firm Wright and Carter used a building on Second Street downtown, or Thompson McDaniel who was headquartered in Independence and G. P. Dorris who worked out of Platte City.¹²⁷ John Doy, a free state settler who spent time in a Platte City jail during the Bleeding Kansas crisis, noted the existence of Wright and Carter, and also

¹²⁵ “Negro Woman and Child for Sale,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, January 14, 1848.

¹²⁶ “Sheriff’s Sale,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, November 12, 1847. In a court of chancery, decisions are handed down based on the principles of fairness and equity, not according to legal precedent in similar cases.

¹²⁷ *The Heritage of Buchanan County*, vol. 1, 20; Wilcox, 193; “Negroes! Negroes!! Twenty-Five Likely Negroes for Sale,” *Liberty Tribune*, February 16, 1849.

mentioned another trading firm in Weston, called White, Williams, and Co.¹²⁸

Although Doy's narrative is from this later period, and it embellishes his experience in the spirit of vivid storytelling, it is one of the only historical sources that describes in detail the slave-trading practices on the border.

Slave traders acquired slaves from a variety of sources. Some purchased slaves at administrator's sales, or as the result of court rulings, as previously discussed. At other times slaves faced the auction block after an attempted escape. Sometimes slave traders captured fugitives and, if the slave's owner never claimed them, these slaves entered a holding cell in the slave trader's building or the local jail until their sale. An enslaved man named Harris, who was from Boone County in central Missouri, had attempted an escape in 1847, most likely heading north to Iowa. He was apprehended and housed in the Athens jail (in Gentry County). According to a newspaper notice, "the owner is required to make application for said slave within three months, and pay all charges incurred on account of said slave, or otherwise he will be sold at public sale to the highest bidder."¹²⁹ The historical record does not state whether or not Harris ultimately faced sale on the courthouse steps, but his story does provide further insight into the context of human trafficking on the border.

Some slave traders, in addition to selling slaves to go "down South," brought slaves from other Southern states to auction houses in Missouri. In 1849 G. P.

¹²⁸ John Doy, *The Narrative of John Doy* (New York: Thomas Holman, 1860), 60. Although Doy certainly had a flair for the dramatic, the pared-down version of the story does provide interesting insights into the process. This is not to say that his perspective was entirely devoid of racial stereotypes, but since this narrative was written within a year of two of his experiences at the hands of pro-slavery Missourians, it has a certain degree of accuracy regarding how white men viewed their incarceration.

¹²⁹ "Runaway Negro," *St. Joseph Gazette*, August 13, 1847.

Dorriss, a slave trader in Platte City, advertised the sale of twenty-five young men and women between the ages of twelve and twenty years old, who “have just arrived from Old Virginia, under the best discipline, bought with care, sound and healthy, and titles good.”¹³⁰ One can only guess at the heart-rending stories behind each of these sales; each individual had been separated from family or other loved ones before coming to an unfamiliar part of the country, on the edge of American settlement, which was surely an experience fraught with uncertainty and loneliness. Slaves from Missouri who faced sale “down South” also dealt with the trauma of being separated from their familiar surroundings and loved ones.

These men and women who faced sale on the block endured intolerable living conditions during their incarceration in the local jail or auction house. It was not uncommon for slaves to be housed in jails until their sale; this situation was convenient for the slave trader since it assured that his “property” would not escape, but by all accounts these men and women encountered violence on a regular basis. According to John Doy’s retelling of his experiences in the Platte City jail, this building was “a gloomy-looking log building, two stories high, and about twenty-four feet square, with walls two feet thick.”¹³¹ Doy and his son, white men who had been accused of aiding fugitives, found themselves in an iron cell about eight feet square with only a mattress, bedstead, rug, cotton carpet, and an iron bucket to serve as a toilet. There was one small window in the hall. When they first entered the jail there was a young black woman on the second floor who had been captured after

¹³⁰ “Negroes! Negroes!! Twenty-Five Likely Negroes for Sale,” *Liberty Tribune*, February 16, 1849.

¹³¹ Doy, 45. Doy was arrested for his abolitionist beliefs and his assistance to free blacks and slaves seeking refuge in Kansas.

attempting an escape; from Doy's account it appears that slaves such as this unidentified woman received even worse treatment than did the Doy's. In 1848, a male slave who was apprehended after escaping from Clinton County (located adjacent to Buchanan, Platte, and Clay counties in Missouri), spent some time in the Clay County jail, in downtown Liberty. A white man named Haggerty, who had been accused of theft, violently murdered the fugitive; according to the *Liberty Tribune*, "the negroe's head was beat into a perfect jelly with a stick of wood. Haggerty pretends to be crazy, but no one believes it."¹³²

Slaves held in jails or elsewhere clearly faced violence, but there were other dehumanizing actions that initiated further emotional and mental trauma. While Doy was incarcerated a large number of slaves were waiting for sale "down South," and "every slave, when brought in, was ordered to strip naked, and was minutely examined for marks, which, with condition of teeth and other details, were carefully noted by the trader in his memorandum book."¹³³ This practice was standard in Southern states and ensured that slave traders (and those purchasing human property) were not being duped. Doy's narrative, though it is from the Bleeding Kansas period, illustrates slave traders' close attention to their financial investments, an attention that surely existed in the pre-territorial era as well.

¹³² "Brutal Murder," *Liberty Tribune*, November 24, 1848.

¹³³ Doy, 59. This activity is mentioned in a variety of secondary sources, including Wilcox, 185-186.

Resistance

Many of the enslaved's experiences in Little Dixie were traumatic emotionally, mentally, and physically; however, there is ample evidence that slaves resisted enslavement in a variety of effective ways. Slavery was a coercive and brutal system—a fact that cannot be neglected—but on the border (as in other Southern states) slaves continually pressed against restrictions on their liberty and carved out a limited degree of autonomy. One form of passive resistance was escape into Indian Territory (what is now Kansas) or Iowa. For slaveowners this was of great concern, particularly since Missouri was geographically bound on two sides by free states: Iowa to the north, and Illinois to the east. Indian Territory to the west was neither officially slave nor officially free, but since slaveowners resided there without government interference or noticeable public censure it was in practice a territory open to the possession of human property.

Slave escapes must have occurred with some frequency in Missouri, since the state government instituted several laws regarding fugitive slaves.¹³⁴ For instance, before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Missouri's general assembly issued an act in 1849 stating that if proof could be made that a fugitive slave within a free state or territory was the legal property of a Missouri slaveowner, the Missouri governor had the power to request "that such Slave may be arrested and delivered to his lawful owner; and that the public officers of such State or Territory may be directed to aid in the capture, safe-keeping and redelivery of such Slave to his owner;

¹³⁴ The Underground Railroad and its implications for slave mobility will receive extensive treatment in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

and in resisting and defeating all unlawful efforts to rescue the slave when taken.”¹³⁵

Strict laws such as these demonstrate that slave escapes were a worrisome issue that concerned both slaveholders and non-slaveholders who sought to perpetuate the system’s existence in the state. Slave escapes were enough of a concern to Jackson County slaveowners that they commissioned a patrol fence that was guarded by men on horseback, proving that local government bodies also involved themselves in the prevention of slave escapes.¹³⁶

Another form of resistance was theft of a slaveowner’s property. In a fugitive want ad posted in Kansas City, slaveholder Joseph Parks stated that his escaped slaves Stephen and John Scott had stolen “a sorrel Mule and two horses from the Methodist mission; also two men’s saddles, one of which is of Spanish make; they are also supposed to be armed, as a gunsmith shop was robbed of some guns about the time of their leaving.”¹³⁷ Once again, these details may have been inaccurate, but there is nevertheless the possibility that these two men thought carefully about their escape route and planned accordingly by taking a means of transportation (horses and saddles) as well as weapons to defend themselves.

In addition to passive resistance, at times enslaved men and women adopted more violent means of asserting their autonomy and defying a slaveholder’s power.

In Platte County, Abe Newby resisted a beating from Dan, a slave foreman, by

¹³⁵ “An Act Respecting Fugitive Slaves,” *Liberty Tribune*, March 9, 1849. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 stated that slaveowners could pursue escaped slaves into Northern states, and that specially appointed slave commissioners were obligated to help those slaveholders retrieve any fugitive. For additional discussion, see Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

¹³⁶ Wilcox, 189.

¹³⁷ “\$150 Reward,” *Liberty Tribune*, June 2, 1848.

pulling out a knife and stabbing Dan to death. Newby was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death by hanging in 1853. His hanging drew a large crowd, and was later remembered as the only judicial slave execution conducted in the county.¹³⁸ Sam and Dill, both enslaved members of Samuel Ralston's household, told their owner that they no longer wished to live with him, which angered him greatly and in response he attempted to whip them. Sam and Dill fled but then returned the next day. When Ralston saw them that morning he determined to maintain discipline and, together with a Mr. Hill, he attempted to "take them" (including another enslaved man, Riley). In response Sam picked up an axe to defend himself, and then after Ralston drew his pistol Sam pulled out a knife. Sam and Riley were not able to fend off the attack—they were whipped—but Dill escaped.¹³⁹ Ralston's letter describing the situation is not followed by additional correspondence elaborating on the situation. From the enslaved men's perspective, however, this was a valiant attempt to resist their owner's authority, even to the point of violence.

The slave system on the western Missouri frontier and in adjoining Indian Territory was well established by 1854, having been shaped into a slave society that centered around this coercive labor system where both slaveholding and non-slaveholding whites attempted (at times successfully) to assert hegemonic control over the enslaved population. Slaves pushed back against these restrictions, at time negotiating more freedoms and at other times challenging slaveowners' control over slave mobility by running away. In this slave society, slavery was central to the two

¹³⁸ George J. Remsburg, "An Old-Timer of Missouri and Kansas," *Atchison Daily Globe*, April 11, 1911.

¹³⁹ W. Darrell Overdyke, "A Southern Family on the Missouri Frontier: Letters from Independence, 1845-1855" *Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 2 (May 1951), 224.

major cash crops, but it was also a vital force behind local business endeavors, home, and community, touching every facet of frontier life. The small-scale slaveholding that flourished on the border at times took on a different cast than slavery in other Southern states, but in terms of the guiding assumptions about gendered divisions of labor and slaves' fitness for physically demanding tasks, in addition to whites' dedication to perpetuating a racial hierarchy, this slave system was not unique among other Upper South states. The similarities between this border region and elsewhere in the Upper South during this period immediately preceding the Bleeding Kansas conflict also illustrates how historians must broaden our definition of Little Dixie. By 1854, however, change was on the horizon. The events that followed the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and the violence that blossomed in the wake of popular sovereignty promised to irrevocably alter this slave system that had, to this point, been continually strengthened and perpetuated by slaveowners and their allies within white society.

CHAPTER 3

CONTESTED GROUND: THE SLAVE EXPERIENCE DURING BLEEDING KANSAS, 1854-1861

In July 1855, an enslaved woman named Lucinda, only recently a resident of Kansas, reached her breaking point. Suffering abuse at the hands of her owner, Grafton Thomasson, she sought escape into the hereafter by drowning herself in the Missouri River near Atchison.¹ After her body washed up on the shore near the ferry landing it lay undisturbed for nearly three days, a silent testament to the abuses of the slave system and a warning to other slaves who might be inclined to resist their owner's authority.² The local community of Atchison, a notoriously strong center of pro-slavery sentiment, was abuzz with questions. Why had she taken her own life? Was she mad? What had happened within Thomasson's household to inspire such a final act of desperation? Perhaps she had been sexually assaulted; as the only enslaved woman in the Thomasson household she would have been particularly vulnerable to such treatment, or maybe she resisted her owner's will in other ways,

¹ According to Pardee Butler's account, her owner was "dangerous" when intoxicated. See Pardee Butler, *Personal Recollections of Pardee Butler* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1889), 62-64. The *Atchison Squatter Sovereign* recorded this in the July 31, 1855 issue, stating that she "was about thirty-nine years of age" and had been missing for several days prior to the discovery of her body. It is possible that she had been trying to swim over to the Missouri side, but that would have been a risky endeavor.

² George P. Remsburg, "Scraps of Local History," *Atchison Daily Globe*, August 9, 1907, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter KSHS), and also C. W. Rust to George Martin, June 14, 1909, in Atchison County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. In Rust's account this woman's suicide was the event that precipitated the abuse of a different abolitionist, Pardee Butler, but in Butler's own reminiscences he never states that his abuse at the hands of a pro-slavery mob was tied to Lucinda's death. It would appear that Rust conflated two different occurrences that took place in Atchison around the same time. See Pardee Butler, *Personal Recollections of Pardee Butler* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1889), 62-64.

carving out a limited sense of personal autonomy through passive acts of resistance that ultimately proved unfruitful.³ An abolitionist lawyer from Cincinnati named J. W. B. Kelley publicly denounced the treatment of her body and hypothesized that Thomasson's cruelty and alcoholism had led to her demise. In response, Thomasson and other pro-slavery men in town stripped off Kelley's clothes and whipped him. Kelley was then banished from the territory, never to be heard from again.⁴

This story acts out in stark relief the tension that existed between slaves, pro-slavery supporters, and anti-slavery advocates, most of whom had recently emigrated to Kansas Territory. Lucinda's suicide and Kelley's abuse at the hands of a vigilante mob blatantly called into question many nineteenth-century Kansans' notions that slavery on the border was a benign institution, an attitude born of a naïveté that encouraged a perverse form of paternalism. As historian Barbara Fields concluded in her work on Maryland, "the middle ground imparted an extra measure of bitterness to enslavement.... Much of the suffering incidental to slavery in Maryland resulted, directly or indirectly, from the small size of slaveholdings."⁵ In Atchison, the local slaveholding community had made clear that any threat to the continued existence of the slave system would be dealt with harshly—a warning to all slaves in the

³ According to the 1855 territorial census, taken in November 1854, there were three slaves in the Thomasson household: Malinda (age forty), Robert (age twenty one), and Susan (a minor). It is possible that Lucinda and Malinda were the same person, since the woman who drowned herself was estimated as being thirty-nine years old. Or, there are two other options; perhaps Thomasson acquired Lucinda at a later date, or when the census taker came to Atchison, it is possible that Lucinda may have been hired out on a different farm in Kansas Territory or across the river in Missouri. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1951).

⁴ Butler, 63-64. See also Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel, *Bleeding Borders: Race, Gender, and Violence in Pre-Civil War Kansas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 47.

⁵ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 24-25.

vicinity—and regular, every-day citizens like Kelley were drawn into a conflict that would foreshadow the events of the Civil War.

This chapter focuses on how border slaveholding functioned in the midst of increasing radicalism and steadfast determination on the part of free soilers, abolitionists, and pro-slavery proponents (including those who owned slaves themselves) to shape Kansas' destiny according to their desires. Most historical treatments of this subject do not address the slaves' own perspective on these events. How, then, were the slaves themselves affected by this discord, and did the system remain stable through this tumultuous crisis? Although slavery had existed in present-day Kansas during the Indian territorial period (from 1830 to 1854), the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and its advocacy of popular sovereignty magnified the peculiar institution that existed on the border and projected it onto the national stage. While the rhetorical—but also sometimes violent—struggle over slavery's expansion is a familiar story to historians of the antebellum period, the true narrative of Bleeding Kansas is incomplete without a detailed assessment of the daily functioning of the slave system.

This chapter argues that, while these early attempts to settle Kansas with a pro-slavery majority seemed destined to succeed, as the conflict progressed slaveholders in both Kansas and Missouri became increasingly fearful that rapid growth in the free-state population would undermine the slave system on the border. Slaveowners and non-slaveholders who supported the system were increasingly on edge. Although in some respects the slave system remained relatively unaffected by this widespread rhetorical struggle, on the ground level slaves encountered more

restrictions on their movement and greater insecurity as slaveholders protected their financial assets by selling their slave property or moving south.

Of course, this labor system persisted on both sides of the line during most of the Bleeding Kansas period because slaveholders (particularly those from the Upper South) continued emigrating into the border region. Pro-slavery residents on the border saw eastern Kansas and western Missouri as an intact region where slavery could flourish (and in fact had already existed) on both sides of the line; this was a political fault line, certainly, but it was not an impenetrable boundary. Consequently, I maintain that slaveholders fully understood that Missouri's propensity for small-scale slaveholding could easily be replicated in Kansas; as historian Christopher Phillips has noted, Missourians fundamentally "saw Kansas as a gift—to them."⁶ This was a promise that Southerners took seriously as they labored to solidify slavery's existence in the territory.

Emigration into Kansas Territory

Even before the territory officially opened for white settlement on May 30, 1854, interested parties throughout the United States had begun organizing emigrant aid societies and other associations committed to influencing Kansas' future status as either a free or slave state. For Northerners, Kansas symbolized an important opportunity to curb slavery's expansion in the West, and anti-slavery advocates

⁶ Christopher Phillips, "'The Crime Against Missouri': Slavery, Kansas, and the Cant of Southernness in the Border West," *Civil War History* 48 (March 2002), 72. Phillips also ties Missourians' interest in Kansas as part of a larger political progress, writing that "by allowing popular sovereignty to dictate the settlement of territories, Western agrarian settlers would forward their idea of democratic promise and thus triumph over a distant, urban, industrial, and thoroughly inferior Northeast" (Phillips, 72).

throughout the North formed organizations like the New England Emigrant Aid Society to ensure Kansas' place as a free state. Southerners, such as Missouri firebrand David Rice Atchison, also believed that Kansas was in a strategic location; if it could become a slave state like neighboring Missouri, then free-soil resistance to slavery in other regions of the West might be curbed.⁷

Slaveholders in Missouri were particularly well suited to a rapid emigration into the territory, thanks to their close proximity and their eagerness to make Kansas a slave state. As C. W. Rust stated in his reminiscence of life in Atchison County during the territorial period, "Missouri being nearest the Kansas line had the advantage of all else in the race for occupancy."⁸ In the first years of settlement—up to 1856—Missourians made a strong showing in terms of population numbers. A pro-slavery convention in Lexington, Missouri in July 1855 agreed that slaveholders

⁷ James C. Malin, "The Proslavery Background of the Kansas Struggle" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 10, no. 3 (December 1923), 289. The historiography of Northern organizations like the New England Emigrant Aid Society (NEEAS) is quite broad. For more information, see Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996); Samuel A. Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom: The New England Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Crusade* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1954); William H. Carruth, "The New England Emigrant Aid Company as an Investment Society" *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1897-1900* 6 (1897): 90-96; Louise Barry, "The New England Emigrant Aid Company Parties of 1854" *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (May 1943): 115-155; and Louise Barry, "The New England Emigrant Aid Company Parties of 1855" *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (August 1943): 227-268. While some historians (like James Malin and William Carruth) have emphasized how the NEEAS was essentially a business geared toward financial profit, this organization and others like it did provide emigrants with supplies, transportation, and other necessities, in addition to initiating an onslaught of promotional literature, press notices, and other materials that could discourage Southerners from embarking on their own ventures. These publications were successful as propaganda, since slaveholders in Missouri and elsewhere in the South firmly believed that the NEEAS had been very successful in settling emigrants in the territory. In reality, historians place the true estimate at around 3,000 people (see Elmer Leroy Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1858" *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1919-1922* 15 [1923], 345). In the earliest years of the battle to populate Kansas, these aid societies succeeded in arousing sympathy for Northern interest in the territory, but in terms of numbers they could not outpace the early emigration flowing across the border from Missouri.

⁸ C. W. Rust, "Observations and Experiences of C. W. Rust in Atchison Co., 1855," c. 1909, in Atchison County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

in the state were well-prepared for a full-scale offensive. Not only was there “no natural boundary” between Kansas and Missouri, but “one-half of the entire slave population of Missouri is located in the eighteen counties bordering on Kansas.”⁹ An unidentified newspaper obliquely referred to this “imaginary boundary” when it stated that “if Slavery, as indicated by the infallible test of the market-price of slaves, is, to a marked degree, prosperous and profitable in the western Counties of Missouri, it must be equally so in Kansas, where the circumstances of soil and climate, and productions, are identical.”¹⁰ The border enjoyed a humid continental climate much like that of states like Illinois, Ohio, and western Virginia.

Slaveholders’ correspondence also attests to Missourians’ eagerness to populate the newly opened territory. John Ralston, writing from Independence, Missouri, in January 1854, hoped to improve his finances and “make Kansas my home if it comes into the Union as a slave state of which we now have no doubt.”¹¹ He was not the only one, since later in that same letter he stated that “the citizens of Missouri are now making claims in the Territory, and will enter the Land as soon as it is surveyed.”¹² Shortly thereafter Ralston did move to Kansas, staking a claim on a tributary of the Osage River (likely the Marais Des Cygnes) about forty-five miles

⁹ William B. Napton, Sterling Price, M. Oliver, and S. H. Woodson, *Address to the People of the United States Together with the Proceedings and Resolutions of the Pro-Slavery Convention of Missouri, Held at Lexington, July 1855* (St. Louis: Republican Office, 1855), 3.

¹⁰ “Value of Slaves in Kansas,” undated, in General Pamphlets Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The term “invisible boundary” comes from William T. Wood, L. A. Wisely, and L. J. Sharp, *Proceedings of the Pro-Slavery Convention, Held at Lexington, Mo.* (St. Louis: Republican Office, 1855), 23.

¹¹ W. Darrell Overdyke, “A Southern Family on the Missouri Frontier: Letters from Independence, 1843-1855,” *The Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 2 (May 1951), 230.

¹² Overdyke, 231.

southwest of Independence.¹³ These conclusions about the border region's identity were not without a basis in fact; the cultural attitudes of residents on both sides of the border were very similar, since both were populated primarily with men and women from the Midwest and Upper South. For many pro-slavery Missourians, then, slavery's expansion into Kansas was a given.

This was the case not only because of the geographic and demographic similarities, but also because slavery had already existed in Kansas prior to 1854 (a fact that Chapter 1 addressed in detail). Slaveholders on the border at times pointed out this very fact. Only a few short months after the territory officially opened for white settlement, a squatters association in Doniphan County passed a series of resolutions; the eleventh stated that "we recognize the institution of Slavery as already existing in this Territory, and recommend to Slaveholders to introduce their property as early as practicable."¹⁴ In addition, a well-known slaveholder and vocal politician named Benjamin Stringfellow wrote a letter to several Southern congressmen in 1855, which was then published in the *New York Tribune*. According to the letter, it was safe to take slave property into Kansas because "slaves are now, and have been for years, in the Territory, so that Slavery, in fact, is already established."¹⁵ In 1858 President Buchanan attempted to reenergize the flagging pro-slavery cause, which by that point had begun to wane. He stated in his annual address to Congress that "it has been solemnly adjudged by the highest judicial tribunal that

¹³ Overdyke, 235.

¹⁴ "A Relic of the Past," *The Kansas Chief*, August 16, 1883, in Doniphan County Clippings, vols. 1-2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The article describes a record book which came to light that contained the minutes of this association's meeting on June 24, 1854.

¹⁵ "Kansas—Slavery, Letter from B. F. Stringfellow," *New York Tribune*, January 27, 1855. One of the letter's recipients was Preston Brooks of South Carolina.

slavery exists in Kansas by virtue of the constitution of the United States. Kansas is, therefore, at this moment as much a slave state as South Carolina or Georgia.”¹⁶ In practice, of course, this characterization is undoubtedly hyperbole, but statements such as this could potentially energize the pro-slavery cause. Interestingly, however, the fact that slavery already existed in the territory did not receive widespread attention in the national media, and this relative silence has remained among some historians and the general public today.

Slaveowners’ language during this period points clearly toward their conviction that Kansas could indeed become a slave state. This is not to say, of course, that they never felt threatened by the prospect of further Northern emigration, but at least in terms of their oratory and public statements slaveholders focused on the positive. A letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune*, submitted by a pro-slavery Kansan, demonstrated this dedication to making Kansas a slave state. The author boldly stated “Now, mark my words, if you please. We shall beat you. We shall firmly establish slavery in that territory, because it is for our interest to do so. And what is more, we don’t care a d—n what the northern people may say. They may wince, but they must swallow the dose.”¹⁷ The *Squatter Sovereign*, published in the pro-slavery town of Atchison, Kansas, printed an article in July 1855 stating that “we can truly answer that no territory in Uncle Sam’s dominions can be found where the slave can be made more secure, or his work command a higher price. Kansas is adapted to slave labor, as all can testify who have experimented in the matter.— Our

¹⁶ Charles E. Cory, “Slavery in Kansas” *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1901-1902* 7 (Topeka: W. Y. Morgan, 1902), 232. The president’s annual message to Congress was the precursor to today’s State of the Union address.

¹⁷ “Kansas to be a Slave State,” *The Kansas Herald of Freedom*, April 21, 1855.

slave population is gradually increasing.”¹⁸ During 1855 it is likely that slave property was indeed safe, but by 1857 it would become clear that slaveholders could not count on the safety of their slave property.

Pro-slavery residents of the border region spoke so confidently about slavery’s inevitable place in Kansas society partly as a way to counteract the free-soil propaganda that flowed so freely in the nation’s newspapers. L. J. Eastin, editor of the *Kansas Herald* published in Leavenworth, said as much in an April 1855 editorial:

We have been assured, time and again, nor do we doubt, that there are thousands of families in many of the old Southern States, who have been contemplating, for months past, a removal to Kansas, but have been deterred from doing so through fear of slavery not becoming one of her institutions. This obstruction is now obliterated, for the infernal machinations of the Emigrant Aid societies have been defeated. Abolitionism has been rebuked and discomfited. Free-soilism has been crippled and overthrown. The Free White State party has been annihilated, and Kansas has declared loudly and decisively in favor of slavery. That Kansas is to become a slave State will admit of no doubt.¹⁹

Statements like this illustrate how the pro-Southern propaganda machine actively responded to charges that Kansas would never become a slaveholding state.

Leading slaveholders who had settled in Kansas while it was still Indian Territory remained in the region and continued to support slavery. Richard Cummins, the Indian agent who lived near the Shawnee Mission in Indian Territory, retired just prior to the Bleeding Kansas conflict and settled in Clay County, Missouri, with his

¹⁸ “Slavery in Kansas,” Atchison *Squatter Sovereign*, July 31, 1855. This was no doubt another example of political hyperbole, since prices on the border would be comparable to other areas in Missouri but would not compare to slave prices in Deep South states, for instance. Interestingly, the author goes on to state that “situated as Missouri is, being surrounded by Free States, we would advise the removal of negroes from the frontier counties to Kansas where they are comparatively safe.”

¹⁹ William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, vol. 1 (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 98.

family and fifteen slaves.²⁰ Thomas Johnson, missionary to the Shawnee and other tribes, was active in the pro-slavery cause and continued his residence at the mission (in present-day Johnson County, Kansas). According to a travel correspondent from the *New York Tribune*, who traveled through the region in 1855, Johnson's home was "the headquarters" of the pro-slavery element so active in territorial politics.²¹

Missouri's slaveholders pledged their support for these claims of slavery's continued existence in the region by forming their own emigrant organizations and voting with their feet. Pro-slavery Southerners (like many Missourians) did not take kindly to Northern emigrant aid societies, considering them to be a violation of the principle of popular sovereignty, but in the face of what seemed like overwhelming Northern opposition, pro-slavery advocates attempted to create their own PR machine to encourage more Southern emigration into the territory.²² A contemporary observer in the territory noted in July 1854 that "the Missourians bordering on the Territory are quite sensitive on the subject, and seem determined to bring Slavery in, in some way or another."²³ Making Kansas a slave territory—and later a slave state—would not

²⁰ Zu Adams, "Slaves in Kansas," September 28, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

²¹ Martha B. Caldwell, *Annals of the Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School*, 2nd ed. (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1977), 85.

²² See Elmer Leroy Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1858" *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1919-1922* 15 (1923): 334-450. Craik's lengthy article on Southern emigration provides many details of Southern attempts to settle pro-slavery men and women in the territory. For example, the *Charleston Mercury* suggested that each Southern state form their own emigrant company and offer stocks that could be purchased to fund land purchases, although their specific plan did not develop in most states (349). A group of Virginians met in Richmond on May 7, 1856, and formed an organization they named "Friends of Kansas." Those involved in the association would receive travel expenses for the entire family, and would even receive a ten dollar bonus for each slave they brought to the territory (424). Virginians did emigrate under the auspices of this organization, but not all of the emigrants permanently settled in Kansas.

²³ "From the West—Affairs at Fort Leavenworth—Slavery in Kansas, &c.," *New York Times*, July 15, 1854, in Kansas Territorial Clippings, vol. 3, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

only protect Missouri slaveholders' property, but it would also bolster Southern interests in Congress by altering the balance between free states and slave states.

Several leading slaveholders in Jackson County, Missouri, including founder James Chiles, organized the Jackson County Pro-Slavery Pioneer Association in early 1856 "to take preparatory steps for forming an organization to aid and assist such persons from this county as desire to remove to Kansas, who are friendly to making the same a slave state."²⁴ Shortly thereafter slaveowners in Platte County, Missouri, formed a joint-stock company with a clearly outlined agenda: "if the slave-holders of this county, and others less interested, will do their duty in this important matter, this society alone, will be able to plant in Kansas, at least 2,000 good bona fide settlers, and pro-slavery voters."²⁵ By the spring of 1856, the *New York Herald* stated that there were approximately 1,900 emigrants who hailed from Southern states, and 1,100 of those men and women were from Missouri; with these recently inaugurated associations on the border that number would grow.²⁶ These emigrants were not entering a territory dominated by abolitionists, even if Northern propaganda implied as much; according to some contemporary estimates, in the first year of emigration (1854-1855) four out of every five emigrants had been pro-slavery.²⁷

Perhaps the best known Southern emigrant organization was Col. Jefferson Buford's company of South Carolinians, Alabamians, and Georgians, numbering 400 men, who came to Douglas County and Lykins County (now Miami County) in 1856. Buford, who left from Eufaula, Alabama, had sold some of his slave property in order

²⁴ "The Jackson County Pro-Slavery Pioneer Association," *Kansas City Enterprise*, February 9, 1856.

²⁵ "Pro-Slavery Aid Society of Platte," *Kansas City Enterprise*, March 15, 1856.

²⁶ Craik, 347.

²⁷ Craik, 343-344.

to finance the venture, a sign of his determination to make Kansas a slave state. His company was initially a force to be reckoned with, but the company suffered from sickness, and Buford became disenchanted as his men scattered and refused to put down roots.²⁸

Further south, in Bourbon County, Kansas, around thirty South Carolinians stopped by Fort Scott in early 1856 and reportedly questioned free-state residents and stole some livestock. Later in that same year a group known as Texas Rangers came into the county, but they left soon after. Clearly some emigrant organizations did appear in the Deep South states, but these efforts never reached their fullest potential, a fact that significantly affected the Bleeding Kansas conflict.²⁹ Peter Abell, a slaveholder in Kansas, argued in 1855 that “if the Southern States now carry out the plans they are resolving, there will in future be no trouble in making Kansas a Slave State.”³⁰ The problem, however, lay in the execution of these plans, and Abell’s wish remained unfulfilled; pro-slavery emigration from states other than Missouri was much smaller in comparison to both Northern emigration and pro-slavery emigration from Missouri.

Among the Southerners who did put down roots in the territory were, of course, slaveowners. Although the national discourse on slavery’s expansion often focused on how slavery could not survive in Kansas, many slaveholders and pro-slavery supporters remained confident that nothing would impede its spread. An observer writing from Fort Leavenworth stated in July 1854 that “strenuous efforts

²⁸ Craik, 497.

²⁹ Craik, 351.

³⁰ Peter T. Abell to L. M. Appelgate, 1855, in Peter T. Abell Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

will be made, and are now making, to legalize its introduction and to place it on a firm foundation. Those eminent Senators who predicted that Slavery would not exist here, will I fear be confuted.”³¹ Joseph Anderson, a member of the first territorial legislature, made a similar prediction in his minority report on “An Act to exempt Slaves from execution.” He argued that this bill would “bolster up the institutions of slavery,” but that this was unnecessary, since “the wild, fertile and beautiful agricultural lands of this territory afford sufficient inducement to southern men to bring their peculiar property to this country when they emigrate.”³² Anderson’s perception of the situation seemed correct during 1854 and 1855, when influential pro-slavery emigrants were slaveholders themselves who assumed powerful positions within the fledgling territorial government, legal system, and law enforcement.³³

In addition to written accounts delineating Southerners’ devotion to the emigration cause, the earliest census records that exist can partially illuminate the number of slaveholders who brought slaves into the territory. Governor Andrew Reeder, the first territorial governor, issued a call on November 10, 1854 for a census of inhabitants; this would be used to determine the number of eligible voters for the first election, which would select the congressional representative from Kansas.³⁴

According to historian Gunja SenGupta, there were sixty-three slaveholders in the

³¹ “From the West—Affairs at Fort Leavenworth—Slavery in Kansas, &c.,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1854, in *Kansas Territorial Clippings*, vol. 3, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

³² Kansas Territorial Legislature, “Report of Minority on Bill entitled ‘An Act to exempt Slaves from execution,’” August 7, 1855, in *Port Vault*, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

³³ Gunja SenGupta’s calculation was that there were 2,979 free males in the 1855 census, and of those whose state of birth could be determined, almost 58 percent came from slave states. See SenGupta, 41.

³⁴ The Kansas State Historical Society later published this census on microfilm as *U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1951). There were other censuses taken in Kansas during the territorial period (for the years 1856, 1857, 1858, and 1859), but none of these provide information on slaveholdings (i.e. the number of slaves in the households, etc.), functioning more as voter lists.

census who could be conclusively identified in terms of “sectional affiliation” and of that number, forty six were from Missouri.³⁵ Although this number may seem insignificant, and with a constant influx of new emigrants the census quickly became obsolete, at the very least emigrants from states that supported the slave system were in the overwhelming majority (even if some of these were opposed to slavery). The Upper South population in the territory was overwhelmingly represented, and as was the case in earlier decades, these Southerners brought their social mores and customs with them to Kansas.³⁶

The census was taken in late 1854 and early 1855 and listed 193 slaves present in the territory, approximately 2.3 percent of the total population.³⁷ The eastern third of the territory, which stretched from modern-day central Kansas to the Kansas-Missouri border, was divided into seventeen voting districts. By far the highest percentage of slaveholders moved into the area closest to the border, and the size of each district points toward the most populated areas. Kansas counties located north of the Kansas River and across the line from St. Joseph and Weston, especially Districts 14 through 17, attracted a fair number of slaveowners.³⁸ In Doniphan

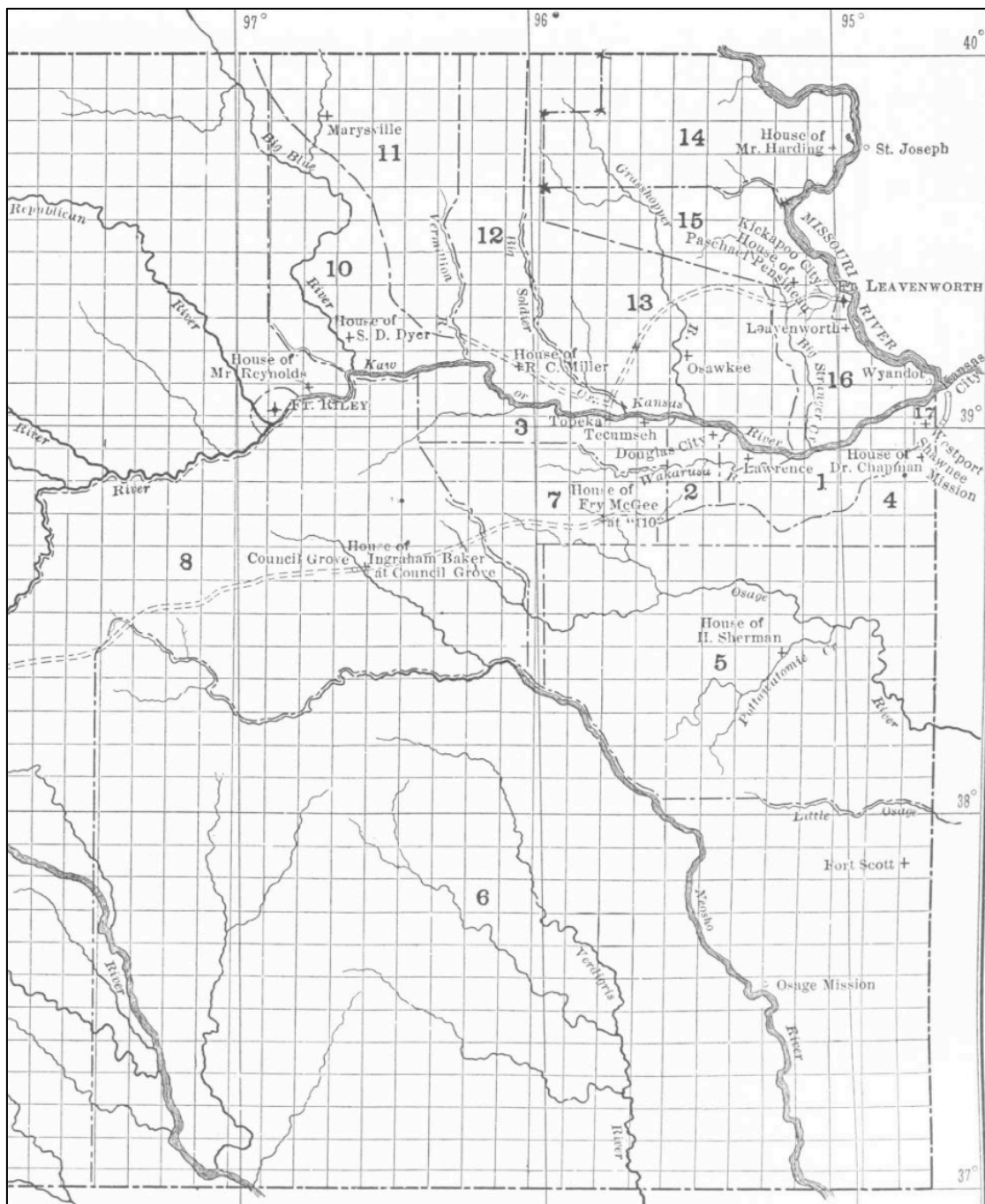
³⁵ SenGupta, 119-120.

³⁶ James R. Shortridge, “People of the New Frontier: Kansas Population Origins, 1865” in *Kansas Territorial Reader*, ed. Virgil W. Dean, 99-119 (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 2005), 103.

³⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1951). This source can only provide information on a very limited window of time, and with new emigrants arriving on a daily basis it cannot be deemed accurate. Nevertheless, as the only thorough data set available to us today it has proved invaluable to researchers. Most historians, including Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel and Nicole Etcheson, have adopted 193 slaves as the most accurate number based on this census data. Gunja SenGupta bases her conclusions on a different calculation of 186 enslaved individuals; she maintains that slaves made up 2.2 percent of the total population in the territory. See Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 120.

³⁸ According to SenGupta, in District 17 slaves made up fifteen percent of the total population. See SenGupta, 119.

Figure 7: Voting Districts in Kansas Territory, 1855



William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883). Reprinted courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

County Daniel Vanderslice, who owned slaves according to the territory's first census, settled at the Nemaha Agency in May of 1853.³⁹ Milton Bryan, another organizer of Doniphan County, founded Wathena in 1854 and brought an enslaved woman named Patsy with him. He had inherited three slaves and the remaining two, Harrison and Cornelia, would eventually come to Kansas as well.⁴⁰ According to George Remsburg, an amateur historian who wrote extensively about local history in the early twentieth century, the first slaves in Atchison belonged to George Million. In addition to Million's slaves, Nathan Hawley, Grafton Thomasson, Horace Herndon, and the outspoken John H. Stringfellow (Benjamin Stringfellow's brother) were also slaveowners in the Atchison area.⁴¹

Counties south of the Kansas River, particularly districts one through seven, also saw a number of slaveholders enter the region. The Skaggs brothers settled in Douglas County, locating near the pro-slavery stronghold of Lecompton.⁴² Just west of Lawrence, in Shawnee County, George Young settled with two female servants, Emily and Cynthia. According to Fannie Cole's reminiscence, Young was one of the first white settlers in the area. One of Young's cousins, Louis Harris, settled nearby

³⁹ "Old Settlers of Doniphan County," *The Kansas Chief*, October 6, 1881, in Doniphan County Clippings, vols. 1-2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁰ Mary F. Wilkinson reminiscence, c. 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴¹ George Remsburg, "Early Atchison Negro History," c. 1932, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. According to C. W. Rust's reminiscence, "John H. Stringfellow was supreme in command" (C. W. Rust, "Observations and Experiences of C. W. Rust in Atchison Co., 1855," c. 1909, in Atchison County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS).

⁴² John Speer, "Slaves in Kansas," c. 1897, in Biographical Scrapbook S, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

and brought a teenaged slave named Henry Clay with him.⁴³ Rush Elmore, a well-known judge in the territory, first came to Kansas in 1854, lodging temporarily at the Shawnee Methodist Mission in present-day Johnson County. At the time he and his wife owned at least fourteen slaves, who entered the territory and moved with the Elmore family when they relocated to Shawnee County sometime in 1855. Elmore frequently traveled for official business and left these slaves in charge of the farm in his absence.⁴⁴ Further south in Bourbon County, a former Indian agent and rabid pro-slavery settler named George W. Clarke owned a forty-five year old slave woman named Ann Clarke.⁴⁵ These are only a few instances that illustrate slaveholders' emigration into the territory during its early existence.

A Struggle for Control

Slaveholders who entered Kansas Territory took their commitment to the peculiar institution seriously. They understood that in order to establish full control they needed not only a majority in terms of sheer numbers, but they also would have to place themselves in powerful positions within the political and legal system. Consequently, slaveholders spoke with impassioned rhetoric about slavery's inevitable existence in the territory, formed emigrant organizations, founded towns,

⁴³ Fannie E. Cole to Zu Adams, October 20, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁴ John Sedgwick Freeland reminiscence, "The Slaves of Judge Rush Elmore," undated, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁵ "The Pioneer Women of Topeka," c. 1908, in Shawnee County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. This may have been written by Zu Adams, although that is speculation. This George W. Clarke is the same person responsible for Thomas Barber's death during the Wakarusa War of 1855. Barber's death was memorialized in John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, "The Death of Barber." See Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 84-85.

created vigilance committees to serve as protection, ran for office, and passed pro-slavery legislation. Many of these techniques were the same methods whereby slaveholders had gained control of western Missouri in the decades before, with one clear exception: the battle for Kansas catapulted the region onto the national stage and made this a fierce contest that would threaten slavery's existence and the Southern way of life.

Slaveholders quickly founded many of the once noteworthy towns in Kansas. Milton Bryan, who owned four slaves according to the 1855 census, founded the town of Wathena in Doniphan County. He had moved from Kentucky around 1828, settling first in central Missouri, then in St. Joseph working as a trader with those traveling on the Santa Fe trail.⁴⁶ Some of the more notorious pro-slavery advocates on the border founded the town of Atchison. David Rice Atchison, its namesake, joined with other vocal slavery supporters like Benjamin Stringfellow, and slaveowners such as Peter T. Abell and George Million in creating the town company.⁴⁷ Brothers James, Cary, and John Whitehead, all slaveowners, came to the territory early in 1855 and two years later James Whitehead founded the town of Concord, also in Atchison County. Phineas Skinner purchased a farm in Jackson

⁴⁶ Ralph Brazelton, "History of Wathena, Kansas," 1978, in General Pamphlets Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Also consult "Biographical Sketch of Milton Bryan," undated, in Milton E. Bryan Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁷ Eva Bixler, "History of Towns and Trails of Atchison County," undated, in General Pamphlets Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

County, Kansas, north of Shawnee County, in 1855 and established a stock ranch and a store; at the time he owned two slaves.⁴⁸

Of course, not all pro-slavery emigrants owned slaves, and not all emigrants from Missouri supported slavery's spread. While records tracing emigrants' political affiliations do not exist in most cases, in some areas we have information about emigrants' nativity. For instance, in order to help supply relief to beleaguered free-state settlers the National Kansas Committee (NKC), a free-soil organization headed by Thaddeus Hyatt, collected information about several Kansas communities. Sometime in 1857 a representative of the NKC (possibly Hyatt himself) spoke with residents along Big Sugar Creek in Linn County, Kansas. According to their survey, there were thirty one free-state households and twenty five pro-slavery households in the area, including two slaveowners who owned three slaves each. Of these emigrants, the vast majority were from Missouri (comprising nineteen heads of free-state households, and twenty one heads of pro-slavery households).⁴⁹ It is not clear if the political makeup of this settlement was indicative of other settlements in Linn County and its environs, but this data nevertheless illustrates in microcosm how Missouri emigrants did not always agree on the slavery question and could divide along political and social lines.

In addition to organizing town companies and unincorporated settlements, these early slaveowners often took on powerful positions within the government and

⁴⁸ Eva Bixler, "History of Towns and Trails of Atchison County," undated, in General Pamphlets Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Zu Adams, "Slaves in Kansas," September 28, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁹ National Kansas Committee, "Residents on Big Sugar Creek," c. 1857, in Thaddeus Hyatt Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The two slaveowners mentioned in this source were Phineas Meanes and William Overstreet. Neither appeared as a slaveowner in the 1855 territorial census.

legal system. Hiero T. Wilson, a slaveowner who had operated the sutler store at Fort Scott since 1843, stayed at the site and continued his business ventures even after the fort was abandoned (temporarily) ten years later. Once the territory opened for white settlement Wilson was involved in the organization of the town of Fort Scott. His home served as the polling place for the 1855 election, and he was one of the town's trustees in addition to acting as an officer of Bourbon County. Fort Scott was officially incorporated on August 30, 1855, and the town code reflected the values of its founders; Section 8 stated that "the trustees shall have power to collect taxes, regulate dramshops, to restrain and prevent the meeting of slaves, etc."⁵⁰ Wilson continued to hold a leading role in the town's future, later serving on the board of commissioners. He was not the only slaveowner in Bourbon County who took an active role in local politics; Thomas Arnett, who ran a hotel in Fort Scott, was a judge during the first territorial election and served on the first board of trustees.⁵¹

In addition to municipal politics, slaveholders dominated in the pro-slavery legislature that was elected fraudulently in 1855. Missionary Thomas Johnson and his son Alexander S. Johnson both served as representatives.⁵² Slaveholders such as these, along with non-residents who flooded over the border on election day and put into office a "bogus" legislature, took an active role in territorial politics. Hiero Wilson, Milton Bryan, and other slaveholders served as representatives at the Lecompton Constitutional Convention.⁵³

⁵⁰ T. F. Robley, *History of Bourbon County, Kansas, to the Close of 1865* (Fort Scott, 1894), 48.

⁵¹ Robley, 48.

⁵² Caldwell, 85.

⁵³ Robley, 61, 79, 88. See also Benjamin Harding to Zu Adams, September 9, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Since the territorial legislature in the first few years of the territory's existence was a pro-slavery body, these representatives passed laws that strengthened the slave system (albeit with limited success). In 1855 they passed "An Act to Punish Offences Against Slave Property" which, if followed to the letter, would ruthlessly curb any efforts to promote emancipation. Section II stated that "every free person who shall aid or assist in any rebellion or insurrection of slaves, free negroes, or mulattoes, or shall furnish arms, or do any over act in furtherance of such rebellion or insurrection, shall suffer death."⁵⁴ The following section took it even further; any free person who publicized or printed abolitionist material would also be guilty of a felony and would be executed. Additionally, any person who "shall aid or assist, harbor or conceal any slave who has escaped...shall be punished in like manner."⁵⁵ The law outraged the free-state element in the territory, who protested that this legislation restricted their First Amendment right to freedom of speech. In practice the law held little weight, partly due to the growing population of anti-slavery settlers and the ensuing difficulty of implementing this legislation. The army contingent that took their orders directly from the governor was spread too thin, and enforcement consequently relied on local militias and roving bands of pro-slavery settlers. For instance, in 1856 the Atchison Rangers posted a notice on a tree near Stranger Creek, demanding that three men in the Hermon family—John, Henry, and George—must "leave Kansas instantly or they

⁵⁴ Kansas Territorial Legislature, "An Act to Punish Offences Against Slave Property, Passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Kansas, August 14, 1856" in General Pamphlets Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁵ Kansas Territorial Legislature, "An Act to Punish Offences Against Slave Property, Passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Kansas, August 14, 1856" in General Pamphlets Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

will be hung”; one of the charges was “for decoying and stealing slaves.”⁵⁶ The Hermons had only ten days to vacate the territory. According to a neighbor, the three men were able to hide in the woods and avoid detection.⁵⁷ Although the free-state element in the territory would not allow the full implementation of this law, the Hermon’s case does illustrate how pro-slavery militias—who often worked outside the parameters of the law—could also enforce laws that they themselves deemed valid, but that free-state settlers considered an abomination.

In addition to pro-slavery militias, some slaveowners (as well as those who were pro-slavery but did not own slaves) organized themselves into vigilance committees. Slaveholders Thomas Arnett and Hiero Wilson of Bourbon County took an active role in their local vigilance committee, whose stated goal was to “assist in the better execution of the law, either by the organization of a militia company or an appeal to the Governor.”⁵⁸ Bourbon County saw a great deal of violence during the Bleeding Kansas period. In Franklin County, Kansas, which was north of Bourbon, several pro-slavery citizens and slaveowners formed the Appanoose Vigilance Committee, and other vigilance committees appeared elsewhere in the territory.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Atchison Rangers, “Notice,” August 23, 1856, in Atchison County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁷ Atchison Rangers, “Notice,” August 23, 1856, in Atchison County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁸ Robley, 88.

⁵⁹ Appanoose Vigilance Committee, Statement of Purpose, undated, in Franklin County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Apotheosis of Southern Influence

In the first years of settlement, slaveholders and other pro-slavery emigrants possessed the majority in terms of the number of settlers entering the territory. However, Southern emigration began to decline in the middle of 1856 and into 1857, at a time when Northern emigration was increasing.⁶⁰ Because there are no detailed records pertaining to emigration rates and no exit data concerning those who left, it is difficult to date this shift with any precision. One historian, Kenneth Stampp, argued that by 1857 “Kansas was rapidly being lost to free-state settlers.”⁶¹ Although the exact turning point cannot be known with certainty, there *was* a demographic reshuffling that affected who controlled the territory. For slaveholders on the border this created an unstable situation where slavery was increasingly undermined, and slave property would no longer be safe either from interference by abolitionists or from slaves’ actions that increasingly demonstrated their own agency.

The Lecompton Constitution, a pro-slavery document that was up for debate in 1857, was the apotheosis of Southern control over the territory’s destiny, not only in terms of a Southern physical presence on the ground but also in terms of the federal government’s sway over territorial affairs. This constitution stipulated, much to the distaste of free soilers, that “the right of property is before and higher than any constitutional sanction, and the right of the owner of a slave to such slave and its increase, is the same and as inviolable as the right of the owner to any property

⁶⁰ James Shortridge, a historical geographer, agrees with this conclusion. He states that “migration from the Upper South into Kansas nearly ceased for almost a decade beginning in 1857” (Shortridge, 107).

⁶¹ Kenneth Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 148.

whatever.”⁶² Furthermore, the state legislature could not issue an order of emancipation without the express consent of slaveholders, and to ensure that slaveholders did not lose money by bringing slaves into the territory, “any person who shall maliciously dismember or deprive a slave of life, shall suffer such punishment as would be inflicted in case the like offence had been committed on a free white person.”⁶³ The Lecompton Constitutional Convention, which did not

Figure 8: Drawing of Lecompton, c. 1855

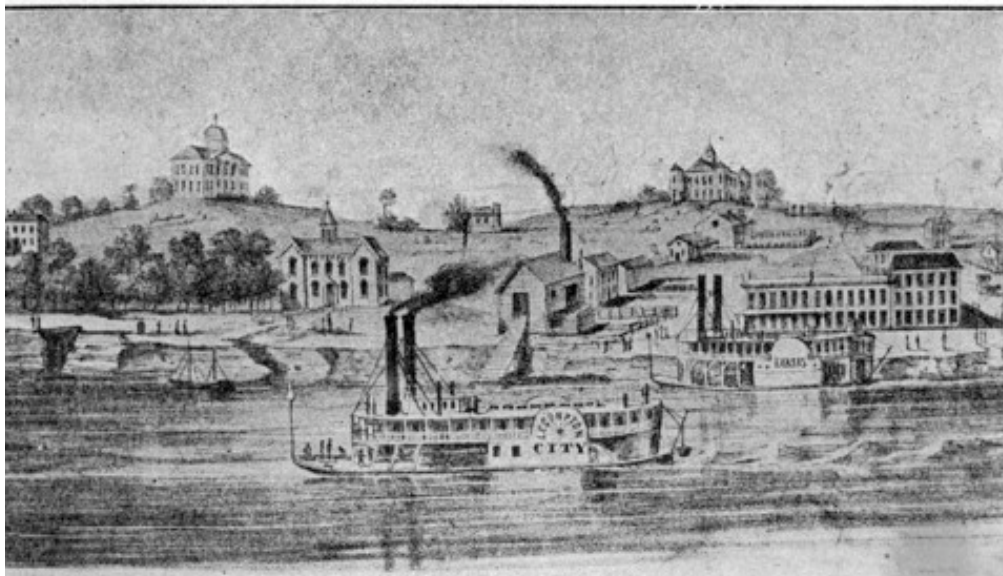


Image courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

represent the wishes of free-state settlers and contained seven slaveholding representatives, put the sections on slavery to a popular vote of Kansas citizens in 1857 (although free-state men boycotted it on principle). The constitution won approval by an overwhelming majority, thanks only to the free-state boycott, and with

⁶² “Constitution of the State of Kansas—Slavery,” *Western Journal of Commerce*, November 28, 1857.

⁶³ “Constitution of the State of Kansas—Slavery,” *Western Journal of Commerce*, November 28, 1857.

a cursory glance this may imply that the pro-slavery forces in Kansas were stronger than ever.⁶⁴

However, the pro-slavery party lost control of the territorial legislature in that same year, and a free-state vote on the Lecompton Constitution in January 1858 soundly defeated its submission, making this document the last attempt on the part of slaveowners and their allies to write a pro-slavery constitution.⁶⁵ By 1858 and 1859, the majority of Kansas residents recognized that it was going to enter the Union as a free state, even before the drafting of the Wyandotte Constitution (which became the Kansas state constitution when Kansas entered the Union in 1861). According to an 1859 article in the *Western Journal of Commerce*, published in Kansas City, Missouri, “Kansas is a non-slaveholding country, and all the Dred Scott decisions in the world, or all the congressional enactments that could be piled upon her, would not be able to make her otherwise.”⁶⁶ Interestingly, the author attributed this to “soil, climate, and latitude” and not to increased Northern emigration, but the fact remained that Kansas was no longer a feasible target for those who encouraged slavery’s expansion. The demise of the Lecompton Constitution did not banish slaveholders from the territory but it certainly made them less sure of their property rights, putting them on the defensive. Of course, the constitution’s failure did not directly affect the slaveholding class who lived on the Missouri side of the line and continued to hold slaves, although the potential pitfalls of being bounded by two free states and one free territory were not lost on slaveholders. They too went on the defensive. That same

⁶⁴ Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 161.

⁶⁵ Etcheson, 163-164.

⁶⁶ “The Territory and the Niggers,” *Western Journal of Commerce*, May 21, 1859.

article in the *Western Journal of Commerce* boldly asserted that slaveholders “intend to buy and hold all the niggers we need, and sell them when we desire so to do, and we also expect to protect our rights when invaded.”⁶⁷ By 1859 the border region, which had once seemed continuous and was distinguished only by an “invisible boundary,” was being redefined as a line dividing slaveholding communities in Missouri from free communities in the territory. At this point, the fates of Kansas and Missouri began to diverge.

Missouri Slavery Extended to Kansas

Slaves on the border may not have participated in the rhetoric struggle over slavery’s existence in the West, but their experiences nevertheless illuminate how slavery manifested itself and functioned on the ground level. In the midst of the political turmoil surrounding the implementation of popular sovereignty, fraudulent voting, competing territorial governments and the Lecompton Constitution, enslaved men and women still lived and worked in Kansas. Of course, slavery in the territory was a small-scale system, since most slaveholding Southerners were convinced that small-scale slaveholding as it existed in Missouri could be (and should be) replicated and transplanted in Kansas. As historian Bill Cecil-Fronsman has noted, even some non-slaveholders in Missouri supported slavery because “it ensured that their status would be protected by an unbridgeable gulf between them and the degraded slaves.”⁶⁸

Historian Christopher Phillips concurred when he observed that many Missourians—

⁶⁷ “The Territory and the Niggers,” *Western Journal of Commerce*, May 21, 1859.

⁶⁸ Bill Cecil-Fronsman, “‘Death to All Yankees and Traitors in Kansas’: The *Squatter Sovereign* and the Defense of Slavery in Kansas” *Kansas History* 16 (Spring 1993), 27.

in contrast to emigrants from Midwestern states such as Illinois and Indiana—saw slavery as perfectly consistent with or even essential to frontier development.⁶⁹

Progress was the cement binding Missourians to the West, and their different definitions of progress set them apart from Northern emigrants. With such a groundswell of support there was no doubt that if slavery would indeed succeed in Kansas, it would closely resemble the slave system in Missouri.

Statistics culled from the 1855 census and surviving reminiscences corroborate the similarities between Kansas and Missouri.⁷⁰ The 1855 census placed 193 slaves in the territory, but with a constant ebb and flow of traffic into and out of the territory this census was bound to be inaccurate virtually as soon as census takers had finished their task. However, the census does provide evidence establishing the basic parameters of slaveholding in Kansas during this snapshot of time. For example, according to the census data, of the slaveowners whose entries are legible the average slaveholding consisted of 2.5 slaves. The largest slaveholder listed, B. H. James, owned ten slaves.⁷¹ Gunja Sen Gupta's calculations differ slightly; she placed the average size of a slaveholding at 2.3 slaves and identified 63 slaveowners whose

⁶⁹ Phillips, 63.

⁷⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1951). The census included the following information: name of each member of the household, their occupation, their age, their sex, where they emigrated from, if they were a native-born citizen, a naturalized citizen, a declarant or a voter. It also had a column for "negro" and another column for "slave," but the census takers were inconsistent in how they filled in these columns. Some would list the name of the slave in the first column (except for their surname), their age, sex, and where they emigrated from, and would then put a check mark in the "negro" and "slave" columns to signify that this individual was a black slave. Other census takers put the number of slaves in that household in these two columns, which meant that other demographic data on those enslaved individuals did not appear in the census.

⁷¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1951). Although the handwriting is difficult to decipher, and there are discrepancies in the way that each census taker recording the data, by my calculation there were seventy-eight slaveholders recorded in the census.

occupation and state of origin could be identified. Sen Gupta also concluded that the more accurate number of slaves in the territory was 186, not 193.⁷² Reminiscences that Zu Adams compiled at the end of the nineteenth century point to a larger slave population than that in the official record. In an 1895 lecture on the subject, she provided Governor Robert J. Walker's estimate that in 1857 the number was between two and three hundred.⁷³ These varied statistics complicate the demographic data available to historians, but by all definitions, slavery in Kansas was a small-scale system that closely resembled the contours of the institution in neighboring Missouri.

A defining characteristic of small-scale slaveholding, and consequently of slaveholding on the Kansas side of the line, was slaves' varied forms of employment. While a slave on a large plantation elsewhere in the South might gain expertise in a very specific task, slaves who lived within a small-scale system might be expected to perform many different functions within the local economy. The enslaved individuals within the Bowen household, in Douglas County, likely assisted Bowen in his makeshift general store in addition to their work on the farm.⁷⁴ Other slaves worked primarily in businesses. Mary Brooks, who owned a tavern in Lecompton, had four slaves that came with her when she emigrated from Virginia in 1855: Aranetta, Julia, Bickey, and Daniel.⁷⁵ Presumably these men and women assisted her by cooking, cleaning, and serving customers. Daphne, a young female slave owned by Fox

⁷² SenGupta, 123. SenGupta's calculations are inconsistent with the conclusions of other historians. Charles Cory also placed the total number of slaves at 193.

⁷³ Zu Adams, "Slaves in Kansas," September 28, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁴ Zu Adams, "Slaves in Kansas," September 28, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁵ Franklin Adams and William L. Smith, Interview about slaves in Lecompton, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Also see William Learner to Franklin Adams, July 13, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Booth, worked as a ferry operator as part of her duties. W. H. Mackey recalled years later that “she has rowed me over the raging Kaw many a time.” Daphne only remained with Booth until sometime in 1855 when he traded her for a white stallion.⁷⁶ Marcus Freeman, who left one of the few direct reminiscences of the enslaved experience in Kansas, first settled near Kansas City and Westport when his owner, Thomas Bayne, relocated there sometime in the 1840s. They then moved to Jefferson County, Kansas, in 1854. For two years Bayne ran a boarding house where Freeman learned how to cook, and later Freeman worked as a printer’s assistant.⁷⁷

This is not to say, however, that slaves in Kansas were peripheral to the growing agricultural economy of the territory. Although Benjamin Stringfellow insisted that “the great staple articles of Kansas must be hemp and tobacco,” in fact diversified agriculture was the preferred system of agricultural production; this is one example of how the labor needs in the territory contrasted with the primary cash crops cultivated in Missouri.⁷⁸ Gunja SenGupta calculated that 65 percent of the slaveholding population identified in the 1855 census were farmers, supporting the idea that slaves did play a significant role in agricultural production.⁷⁹ Nathaniel Newby, who farmed on Crooked Creek near Atchison, had at least six slaves; some of these no doubt worked in the fields during the planting and harvesting seasons.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ W. H. Mackey to George, March 26, 1902, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁷ Marcus Lindsay Freeman, “Reminiscence of Marcus Lindsay Freeman, A Former Slave,” c. 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁸ SenGupta, 123.

⁷⁹ SenGupta, 120.

⁸⁰ Zu Adams, “Slaves in Kansas,” September 28, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Charles Cory listed a Nathan Hawley as having six slaves on Crooked Creek (in wording quite similar to that in Adams’ speech), but it is unclear if this is the same person. Neither Cory nor Adams included citations in their work to provide the reader with primary sources as

John Ralston, who had moved to Kansas sometime in the spring or early summer of 1855, had some of his father's slaves living with him and helping him improve the land.⁸¹

As with the earliest settlements in Missouri, slaves who worked on farms also spent a significant portion of their time making improvements to the land and caring for stock. The slaves of James Skaggs, who moved to the Lecompton area in 1854 or 1855, cleared land and build a log house.⁸² Wert, a slave of Rush Elmore, had experience with plowing and with driving cattle.⁸³ Generally slaves were quite visible within Kansas communities; as a result, free state settlers who opposed slavery were not just arguing against the system in an abstract, detached way; they had seen slaves at local businesses, working in the field, and elsewhere around town. Kansas slaves' employment in varied occupations is yet another example of how slavery in the territory was an extension of the system that already existed on the Missouri side of the line.

A prevalence of abroad marriages is also, according to historian Diane Mutti-Burke, another sign that slavery on the border remained a small-scale institution during the Bleeding Kansas period. Bill Simms, a former slave who left a

evidence. See Cory, 240. George Remsburg, an amateur historian, also stated that a Nathan Hawley owned six slaves, but it is likely that he drew that number from Cory's work. See George Remsburg, "Early Atchison Negro History," c. 1932, in *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸¹ Overdyke, 236. According to a letter his father Samuel Ralston wrote on August 31, 1855, "He [John] has some of my Negroes in the Territory, and they work on his claim & mine simultaneously, this is done in order to secure both" (236). This language implies that Samuel also had a farm in the territory (that needed securing), an assertion that is strengthened by other statements in the letter, including Samuel's reference to Wilson Shannon as "our governor" (237).

⁸² John Speer, "Reminiscences of James Skaggs," in *Slaves and Slavery Collection*, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸³ Rush Elmore to Albert Elmore, January 13, 1859, in *Rush Elmore Miscellaneous Collection*, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

reminiscence of his life on the border, said that “if a slave wanted to marry a woman on another plantation he had to ask the master, and if both masters agreed they were married. The man stayed at his owners, and the wife at her owners. He could go to see her on Saturday night and Sunday.”⁸⁴ Marcus Freeman’s sister Charity, who had come to Jefferson County, Kansas, in 1855, married Robert Skaggs, whose owner James Skaggs lived nearby. When James Skaggs took his slaves to Texas in the year just before the onset of civil war, Charity was able to go with her husband.⁸⁵ Abroad marriages were common elsewhere in the Upper South, as reminiscences from other Missouri counties can attest. Jennie Hill, a former slave from central Missouri who later settled in Wichita, Kansas, had an abroad marriage with a man who lived on a farm about a mile away. Of course, marriages such as this were not legal, and in many cases there was no ceremony since it “wasn’t much good for a slave wasn’t allowed to take any vows.”⁸⁶ This did not, of course, mean that enslaved men and women considered these voluntary relationships to be free of obligation or commitment, even if realistically the two parties understood that permanency was no guarantee.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Bill Simms, “Ex Slave Story,” c. 1938, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves*, vol. 6, *Kansas Narratives* (Washington D.C., 1941), 12.

⁸⁵ Marcus Freeman, “Reminiscence of Marcus Lindsay Freeman, A Former Slave,” c. 1895, in *Slaves and Slavery Collection*, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸⁶ Florence Patton, “Memories of a Quarter Century as a Slave; Mrs. Jennie Hill Remembers Days Before Civil War,” *Wichita Eagle*, February 26, 1933, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Hill lived near Boonville in Howard County, Missouri; her owner was Aaron Fray, who according to the 1850 slave schedule owned four female slaves ranging in ages from ten to thirty. The enslaved girl, aged twelve, was most likely Jennie since that corroborates her age as stated in the article. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1850, *Slave Schedules* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853).

⁸⁷ For additional context regarding slave marriages elsewhere in the South, consult Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 149-150, 154-155.

A final indicator of the small-scale slave system that developed in the territory was increased contact between slaveowner and slave, which often came about due to close living arrangements. Since such a high percentage of Kansas slaveholders owned only one slave according to the 1855 census, it is unlikely that those enslaved individuals had a separate house, particularly since most of the early settlers were working quickly to set up a house for themselves. The ten slaves belonging to Rush Elmore gradually built log cabins that were located near the Elmore's house. From contemporary descriptions of these slave families there were seven children below the age of fifteen and only two men capable of heavy labor; it is likely, then, that Mike (aged thirty) and Pompey (aged fifteen) were responsible for building these houses.⁸⁸ Axalla Hoole, who settled in the territory in 1856 with his new bride Betsy, initially boarded with Paris Ellison, his wife and children, and their four slaves: Sarah, Louisa, Andrew Jackson, and Laura.⁸⁹ The Ellison farm near Douglas (a now defunct town close to Lecompton) consisted of "three log houses built in a row—the middle one of which is the kitchen where the Negroes stay."⁹⁰ With four slaves and what Hoole described as "very poor houses," including a separate kitchen facility, Ellison and the white family no doubt kept in close contact with the slaves. A slaveholder named Bowen, who lived in a pro-slavery settlement on Washington Creek in Douglas County, brought ten slaves with him when he emigrated to the territory in 1855. According to a reminiscence recorded later by a free-state settler who lived in the

⁸⁸ "The Slaves of Judge Rush Elmore," undated, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1855 Territorial Kansas Census* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1951).

⁹⁰ William Stanley Hoole, ed., "A Southerner's Viewpoint of the Kansas Situation, 1856-1857: The Letters of Lieut. Col. A. J. Hoole, C. S. A." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 3 (February 1934), 46.

neighborhood, the enslaved residents of Bowen's farm had a two-room log cabin ten rods (about fifty-five yards) from the main house.⁹¹ If all ten slaves—which included about eight children—were crowded into one cabin there was very little opportunity for personal space of any kind. Although a separate house would have allowed the slaves some privacy, away from the prying eyes of the slaveowner and his family, the situation still facilitated a close physical proximity between slaves and slaveowners. On a large plantation, such as that of Jabez Smith in Jackson County, Missouri, most slaves did not see the slaveowner on a regular basis; this would have been quite unlike the small-scale farming system that was predominant in Kansas. Close quarters such as these were not uncommon in frontier settlements, regardless of whether the inhabitants were enslaved or free, and for better or for worse enslaved men, women, and children had frequently contact with slaveholders.

A Continuity of Experience

The peculiar institution in Kansas, as on the Missouri side of the line, functioned in large part according to the same operating assumptions as elsewhere in the Upper South, even when the border was a central site of the growing sectional conflict. The system reinforced whites' insistence on maintaining their position on the racial hierarchy, which went hand-in-hand with their paternalistic attitudes towards the enslaved population. Although the uniqueness of the Bleeding Kansas conflict did affect the day-to-day practice of slavery on both sides of the line, there

⁹¹ John Armstrong, "Reminiscences of Slave Days in Kansas," in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

were some aspects of this border labor system that remained constant during this period. Slaves on both sides of the line faced physical hardships and sickness, conflicts with their owners, and separation from their loved ones, experiences that their Southern brethren shared. Even as political debates over slavery dominated the national scene during this period, the challenges that slaves encountered were ever present, and in most instances life continued on as normal.

One example of this continuity of experience is the interstate slave trade. Although slave sales were not common in the territory, since the number of slave residents was small, there were some instances that have been preserved in the historical record. According to Pryor Plank, there was a slave auction at Iowa Point in Doniphan County, Kansas, in 1858. He recalled that “these slaves belonged to the estate of Andrew Jasper who emigrated from Kentucky to Doniphan County in 1856 bringing these negro slaves with him. Mr. Jasper died September 15, 1857 and the slaves were sold as above stated.”⁹² Within this household there were at least two women and an unidentified number of children. Two of the purchasers were from Missouri (Anderson County and Holt County, respectively), illustrating once again the close ties between in Missouri and Kansas slaveholders. These slaveowners probably learned of this auction through a newspaper advertisement or word of mouth. This was not the only instance of a slave’s sale within Kansas’ borders, but it is the only recorded mention of a slave auction of multiple individuals.

⁹² Pryor Plank, handwritten notation regarding slave sale, undated, in William Patton Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter SRL).

Figure 9: Bill of Sale for Penelope, 1856

Received of Wm. Patton Six
 Hundred & fifty dollars in full
 Payment for a Negro Girl named
 Penelope about Eleven years Old
 the title of which I warrant and
 for ever defend to be cleared
 free of all claim or claims.
 I also warrant said Slave to be
 Sound in body & mind and
 Slave for life
 Given under my hand and
 Seal This 9th September 1856
 C. A. Thornton

Slave bill of sale between C. A. Thornton and William Patton, September 9, 1856. Courtesy of the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

Most slave sales involved only one slave. In May 1856, Thomas Johnson of the Methodist mission had bought fifteen-year old Martha for 800 dollars.⁹³ Only a few months later, in September, an eleven-year old girl named Penelope was purchased by William Patton at the cost of 650 dollars.⁹⁴ The reasons behind these sales are unclear, but it is possible that these slaveowners had realized the institution's tenuous grasp on the territory and wished to protect their assets by selling slave property (an issue that will receive further attention later in the chapter). In any case, slave sales did occur in Kansas Territory.

⁹³ Slave bill of sale between David Burge and Thomas Johnson, May 24, 1856, in Alexander and Thomas Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁴ Slave bill of sale between C. A. Thornton and William Patton, September 9, 1856, in William Patton Papers, Kansas Collection, SRL.

Slave sales also continued on the Missouri side of the line. In 1857, N. W. Miller of Independence sold Sibba Ann (aged twenty four) to Andrew Lower for the sum of one thousand dollars.⁹⁵ Jabez Smith, who was the largest slaveholding on the border (with over 300 slaves) sold a male slave sometime in 1855 or 1856. This unidentified man reportedly had a wife and thirteen children and refused to “go South.”⁹⁶ As former Missouri slave William Wells Brown noted in his 1847 narrative, “it was not an unfrequent occurrence to have on board gangs of slaves on their way to the cotton, sugar and rice plantations of the south,” yet another sign that slavery in the West was not a benign institution.⁹⁷

Other slaveholders, including those in Kansas Territory, participated in the slave trade as a way to pay off mounting debts. In 1859 Rush Elmore sent all of his and his wife’s slaves to his brother Albert Elmore in Alabama, asking Albert to “sell them as early as possible. I would prefer them to be sold in families; but if they will sell better by separating the larger children only do so. I do not wish the younger ones to be separated from their mothers.”⁹⁸ Rush’s other brother John Elmore apparently wanted Harper and Violet, and Rush hoped that Webster and Malinda (two of Violet’s other children) would go to John as well.⁹⁹ The slaves set out for Alabama at the end of that month under the authority of John Martin, a friend of the

⁹⁵ Slave bill of sale between N. W. Miller and Andrew Lower, January 1, 1857, Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁶ “Murder of a Negro,” *Kansas Herald of Freedom*, March 22, 1856. It is unclear when this slave was sold, but since Smith died in 1855 it is possible that this man was actually sold by the estate’s executors.

⁹⁷ William Wells Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1969), 11.

⁹⁸ Rush Elmore to Albert S. Elmore, January 13, 1859, in Rush Elmore Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁹ Rush Elmore to Albert S. Elmore, January 24, 1859, in Rush Elmore Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Elmore family who had power of attorney. Elmore continued to write letters to his brother dictating how much each slave was worth and other details, emphasizing which debts were of the highest priority.¹⁰⁰ Slaves on the border especially dreaded being sold “down South”—although sale in any state was a frightful experience—having heard about the brutality that defined slaves’ experiences in slave pens and on the auction block.¹⁰¹

These letters do not provide information about the Elmore slaves’ feelings upon being sold, but entering into a new master-slave relationship was no doubt a cause for considerable worry, particularly if separation from family was a possibility. William Wells Brown, who was enslaved elsewhere in Missouri and hired out to work on steamboats carrying human cargo, was separated from his sister and his mother because of such sales. When he recounted his last, heart-wrenching conversation with his sister, he wrote that “as soon as she observed me she sprung up, threw her arms around my neck, leaned her head upon my breast, and without uttering a word, burst into tears. As soon as she recovered herself sufficiently to speak, she advised me to take mother, and try to get out of slavery.”¹⁰² Jennie Hill, who had been enslaved in central Missouri, recalled in an interview with a newspaper

¹⁰⁰ Although the slave system in Kansas was certainly unstable in 1859—and perhaps Elmore sold these slaves because he realized the precariousness of the system—all of these letters indicate that the slave sales were the only way that Elmore could pay his creditors. The language in the letters points to a dire sense of urgency on Elmore’s part.

¹⁰¹ Jennie Hill’s statements about being sold “down South” are only one example of how enslaved men and women perceived these sales. Hill was enslaved in central Missouri but her reactions are surely similar to those of bondpeople on the border. According to her reminiscence recorded at the age of ninety six, slave traders would separate families without a care, before these individuals were “driven to the boat landing just like cattle and loaded onto the river steamer for the trip ‘down south’” (Florence Patton, “Memories of a Quarter Century as a Slave; Mrs. Jennie Hill Remembers Days Before Civil War,” *Wichita Eagle*, February 26, 1933, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS).

¹⁰² Brown, 28.

reporter that contrary to what some of her contemporaries might think, these enslaved individuals felt great sorrow at the separations.¹⁰³ No comparable narrative exists to describe the reaction of slaves on the border who were sold away from their familiar surroundings and loved ones, but it can be inferred that similar discussions must have occurred with some regularity.

Another continuous thread of the slave experience on the border was black resistance. The unidentified male slave who had escaped from one of Jabez Smith's plantations in Jackson County, Missouri, violently resisted his sale. According to an account published in the free-state Kansas paper, *The Herald of Freedom*, while he was inside a store "an attempt was made to handcuff him, but he broke away from his pursuers, and fled into the street. He was followed and fired upon, several shots hitting him in the leg, shoulder, &c."¹⁰⁴ After he fell to the ground, he was beaten and kicked to death because when "they inquired if he would give up "NO!" was the response."¹⁰⁵ This brutality was not uncommon in a system as coercive as the peculiar institution, but slaves continued to resist their owners with violence in order to exert some independence.

In St. Joseph (Buchanan County), Missouri, forms of violence resistance could also be found. Sometime in 1859 an enslaved man was sold to a slave trader bound for the New Orleans market. This slave trader, identified only as Wright, kept a loaded pistol in his buggy within easy reach. When Wright stepped out of the

¹⁰³ Florence Patton, "Memories of a Quarter Century as a Slave; Mrs. Jennie Hill Remembers Days Before Civil War," *Wichita Eagle*, February 26, 1933, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁰⁴ "Murder of a Negro," *Kansas Herald of Freedom*, March 22, 1856.

¹⁰⁵ "Murder of a Negro," *Kansas Herald of Freedom*, March 22, 1856.

buggy to water his horse at a roadside spring, his captive pulled out the revolver and shot Wright in the head before grabbing the reins, taking off in the buggy before abandoning it and running into the brush.¹⁰⁶ A local posse captured the fugitive a few days later, and it was only at the lawmen's intervention that he was not lynched. He was tried, convicted, and executed not long after. Although his execution was legally sanctioned by the court, it was of course a rigged system since slaves could not testify in court and had virtually no legal rights. This incident, however, demonstrates slaves' great fear of being "sold South" and the seriousness with which they attempted to circumvent the wishes of slaveowners and slave traders. Violence was only one weapon in slaves' arsenal of resistance, and in particularly serious situations that had profound repercussions for families (and the entire slave community), some enslaved individuals acted violently in defense of their own liberties.

Enslaved men were more likely to embrace violent resistance (especially that of a particularly aggressive nature), but the female slaves who participated in acts of resistance usually exhibited behavior that conformed to nineteenth-century gender norms. Two female slaves at Fort Riley, Cely and her daughter Patsy, faced accusations that they had poisoned an ordnance sergeant. According to a white reminiscence, "they were both taken down to the saw mill.... The two were set astride the log and the saw started. When the saw got uncomfortably close Aunt Cely declared 'Fo God I is innocent.' The saw was stopped and they were released."¹⁰⁷

Unfortunately, as was usually the case, Cely and Patsy's perspective remains

¹⁰⁶ Miscellaneous manuscript, undated, in Joseph Robidoux Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Columbia (hereafter WHMC—C).

¹⁰⁷ W. H. Mackey to George, March 26, 1902, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

unrecorded. It is possible that they had suffered abuse—sexual or otherwise—at the hands of this unidentified sergeant and were attempting to protect themselves. Or, it is equally possible that they were innocent of all charges and when the sergeant died “mysteriously” the local white community assumed that Cely and Patsy were responsible.

This story demonstrates two key points about the slave system in Kansas. First, Cely and Patsy’s roles within the household clearly involved traditionally female tasks such as food preparation, since their presence in the kitchen implicated them in the affair and made them subjects of the white community’s suspicion. If these women had had no interaction with the sergeant’s food they might have likely remained above reproach. Their fulfillment of gendered expectations of female labor would have provided them the opportunity to slip poison into the sergeant’s food (if they were indeed guilty of the accusation). Second, slaves in the territory, like slaves on the other side of the line, were not given a fair trial and a mob’s rattled emotions prevailed as the primary means of slave punishment. Slaves in Kansas had no legal standing and no recourse in these situations; they had to rely largely on their own wits and hope for some sympathetic treatment from whites.

Slaves also adopted more passive—and consequently less risky—methods of gaining autonomy and increasing the likelihood that they might one day be free. The enslaved members of Bowen’s household, in Douglas County, Kansas, sometimes snuck over to a white neighbor’s house only a quarter of a mile away, where Sarah Armstrong taught them the alphabet without their owner’s knowledge. When Bowen discovered this fact he threatened Armstrong, who sought out the local free-state

militia for protection. Bowen and the slaves reportedly moved to Westport shortly thereafter.¹⁰⁸ Across the river in Weston, Missouri, a Northern preacher named Frederick Starr educated several slaves, but after word of these activities reached the general public he was encouraged to discontinue these efforts.¹⁰⁹ The education of slaves was illegal in many Southern states, including Missouri, because slaveowners understood (quite accurately) that being able to read and write gave slaves more marketable skills as laborers and greater opportunities to escape and navigate the free world.¹¹⁰ Historian William Wilson Elwang noted that Missouri slaveholders “felt with the same class all over the South, that the mental improvement of the slaves meant their dissatisfaction and possible insurrection and rebellion. The submission of the man with the dark skin was secured by keeping his mind dark.”¹¹¹ These fears circulated throughout the Kansas slaveholding community as well; Bowen’s departure for Westport—which was only about fifty miles away—signaled the impending changes that promised to alter the slave system in Kansas. In the eyes of slaveholders, this foreshadowed and reinforced their mounting insecurities about their place in the territory.

¹⁰⁸ John Armstrong, “Reminiscences of Slave Days in Kansas,” in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. John Armstrong, who recorded this reminiscence, was Sarah Armstrong’s brother and an active participant in Underground Railroad activities in Kansas.

¹⁰⁹ Donnie D. Bellamy, “The Education of Blacks in Missouri Prior to 1861” *Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (April 1974), 154.

¹¹⁰ According to “An Act Respecting Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes,” which the Missouri General Assembly passed in 1847, “no person shall keep or teach any school for the instruction of negroes or mulattoes, in reading or writing, in this State” (*Laws of the State of Missouri Passed at the First Session of the Fourteenth General Assembly* [Jefferson City: James Lusk, 1847], in Blacks in Missouri History [pre-1866] Vertical File, SHSM).

¹¹¹ William Wilson Elwang, *The Negroes of Columbia, Missouri: A Concrete Study of the Race Problem* (Columbia, 1904), 38, quoted in Bellamy, 145.

Other accounts of slave resistance describe slaves who attempted to negotiate with whites over their treatment, sometimes successfully pitting one white against another. Mike, a slave of Rush Elmore, exhibited “disobedient and unruly” behavior according to white neighbors, and on one particular occasion an overseer named Benjamin Newsom determined to whip Mike. According to a reminiscence left by a white contemporary, “Mike said he wouldn’t let anyone whip him but Massa Elmore, and that it was a tight fit if he let him do it. Mike then started on a run for Lecompton and Newsom after him.”¹¹² As Mike was running away a white neighbor named Emerson noticed the commotion and came to Mike’s defense, promising to stay with him at that place until Elmore returned home and could resolve the conflict. After Elmore arrived Mike “told him that he had better sell him, ‘for I won’t do you any good here.’”¹¹³ Elmore reportedly let Mike choose his new master, who lived somewhere in Missouri. It is possible that Elmore understood the tenuous grasp he exerted on his slave property and believed that it would be more amenable to simply let Mike leave the Elmore household.

There are two intriguing elements to this story. First, while this account is clearly from the white perspective and as a result it no doubt misrepresents the truth of the matter, it does suggest that Mike was well aware of which whites had authority over him and effectively limited their control over his body. What whites characterized as “unruly” behavior was Mike’s attempt to assert agency over his own destiny. Second, although Emerson’s political allegiance and position on the slavery

¹¹² John Sedgwick Freeland reminiscence, “The Slaves of Judge Rush Elmore,” undated, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹¹³ John Sedgwick Freeland reminiscence, “The Slaves of Judge Rush Elmore,” undated, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

issue is unknown, Kansas slaves were part of diverse communities of both pro-slavery and free-state settlers making the chances of finding a sympathetic ally more possible. This was one of the unique features of the slave system on the Kansas frontier.

Resistance to slaveowners' power continued on the Missouri side of the border as well. In 1859 two male slaves, Farrel and John, were executed in Lexington after they allegedly murdered their overseer, Henry Nance. According to one newspaper account, the slaves admitted that they had murdered Nance because he had whipped them and they did not respect his authority. To make matters worse, John did not display the appropriate amount of remorse after the fact, at least in the eyes of the white community. Their execution drew a large crowd composed of both white and black observers.¹¹⁴ Executions such as this reinforced white authority in the community and sought to discourage bad behavior and violent resistance to slaveowners and overseers. The black response to the execution, as evidenced by the fact that they turned out in large numbers, was one of great interest, and likely a sign of solidarity for their accused brethren. Even if some enslaved men and women did not condone violence, this particular situation appeared to be a case of self-defense and there is no doubt that the local slave community spoke amongst themselves about the appropriate uses of violence as a means of resistance. John and Farrel were, not surprisingly, part of a larger network of violent resistance in western Missouri.

¹¹⁴ "Execution of Negroes," *Western Journal of Commerce*, January 8, 1859.

Slave System Undermined

Although slaves' daily experiences during the Bleeding Kansas conflict may not have always reflected the political and social struggle over Southern expansion into the West, slaveholders on both sides of the line did fear for the safety of their land and property holdings (which included slaves). At the proslavery convention held in Lexington in 1855 slaveholders strongly expressed such sentiments and intimated that these fears were prevalent throughout the slaveholding class. In their address, the convention boldly declared that a free-state population in Kansas "would be fatal to the peace and security of the neighboring State of Missouri, and immediate destruction of such owners of slaves as had already moved to the Territory of Kansas, is too clear to admit of argument."¹¹⁵ The convention's remarks often tended toward hyperbole, but even so, these exaggerations likely stemmed from a deep-seated unease about the future of slaveholding on the border that would lead to additional restrictions on slaves' movement (an issue that will receive further attention in Chapter 4).

With the political fervor that was part and parcel of the Bleeding Kansas conflict, increased abolitionist talk within the white community put slaveowners on edge and pointed to what they believed was another sign that slavery in the region was being undermined. From the pro-slavery perspective, these abolitionists did more than just incite heated discussions and debates over the issue; abolitionists worked in collusion with slaves and free blacks and consequently could do real financial harm to slaveholders. The most rabidly pro-slavery newspaper in the

¹¹⁵ Napton, et. al., 7.

territory, the *Atchison Squatter Sovereign*, warned its readers about the effect of emigrants from “eastern cities” who spoke with slaves to encourage dissatisfaction with their current situation. Slaveholders who did not heed this warning would find that their refusal to do so could have powerful effects. For example, the same newspaper argued that sometime in 1855 an enslaved woman in the Atchison area was “induced to believe that she ‘was illegally held in bondage,’ and that she was ‘on an equality with her owners;’ since which time she has been unruly, and shows evidences of discontent.”¹¹⁶ As the *Squatter Sovereign* diligently informed its readers, “the existence of an organised band of abolitionists [is] in our midst. We counsel our friends, who have money in slave property, to keep a sharp look out.”¹¹⁷ In the case of Wright’s murder outside St. Joseph in 1859, the *Western Journal of Commerce* suspected that while the slave may have killed Wright, it was also possible that “the deed was done by some Abolitionist, in order to free the negro.”¹¹⁸ The idea of an abolitionist committing murder to free an enslaved individual was not far-fetched to the readership of this newspaper.

Axalla Hoole, who lived in Douglas County, noted in a letter to his sister that “One of our neighbors has missed a Negro fellow and supposes he has been carried off by the Abolitionists.... They have tried to induce a good many to run away.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ “Watch the Abolitionists,” *Atchison Squatter Sovereign*, August 7, 1855.

¹¹⁷ “Watch the Abolitionists,” *Atchison Squatter Sovereign*, August 7, 1855.

¹¹⁸ “Murder,” *Western Journal of Commerce*, July 21, 1859. According to this article, Wright had just been to Gentry County (near the Iowa border) to purchase a slave, and the two witnesses who had last seen Wright claimed that the slave had been driving the carriage. Wright was “shot in the back part of the head and the blood was flowing copiously. He was dead when discovered and the negro gone.... The pistol was found in the buggy, and the money [\$1,400 worth of gold] was undisturbed.” This is the same murder that was described in the undated and unsigned manuscript that is part of the Joseph Robidoux Papers, WHMC—C, although some of the details are inconsistent.

¹¹⁹ Hoole, 67.

Bill Simms, a former slave from Osceola, Missouri, who ended up in Ottawa, Kansas, recalled later that “slaves were never allowed to talk to white people other than their masters or someone their master knew, as they were afraid the white man might have the slave run away.”¹²⁰ Abolitionists could do great harm to the slave system, which made them allies of the slave population; according to Simms, the “more intelligent” slaves knew who could assist them in obtaining freedom. Aside from Simms’ reminiscence, African Americans’ reactions to this discourse have not survived the passage of time, but slaveholders’ fear of abolitionism no doubt translated into increased supervision over slaves and a greater sense of paranoia among the slaveholding class.

Even mere discussion of abolition had the potential to put slave property in jeopardy. According to an article from the *Western Journal of Commerce*, “more slaves have been run off from Missouri by the intemperate discussion and excitement on this question in their presence, by those who do not own any, than from all other causes.”¹²¹ The article implies that this “intemperate discussion” was occurring among non-slaveowners who had great interest in the situation, but it is also likely that the abolitionist presence on the border was increasing and contributing to what slaveowners considered a problematic situation. Slaveholders vehemently believed that abolitionists, both black and white, would go to great lengths in their pursuit of slaves’ emancipation.

¹²⁰ Bill Simms, “Ex Slave Story,” c. 1938, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves*, vol. 6, *Kansas Narratives* (Washington D.C., 1941), 9.

¹²¹ “It is Offensive and Uncalled For,” *Western Journal of Commerce*, August 25, 1859.

Slaveholders' fears about the dangerous influence of abolition, combined with the outbreaks of violence during the territorial period, were only confirmed when slaveholders on both sides of the border voluntarily moved away to protect their property.¹²² This became more and more common as the pro-slavery element lost their edge in Kansas, or as a Quaker abolitionist named Isaac Maris recalled in a later reminiscence, "things began to look quite critical here for the slavery interest and the slaves were generally taken out of Kansas."¹²³ Alexander Johnson, the son of missionary Thomas Johnson, left for Missouri but some of his slaves remained on his Kansas farm just across the border.¹²⁴ According to Benjamin Harding, a free state settler in Doniphan County, Carey Whitehead maintained that "'he had never lived in a free state and swore he never would,' so when the slavery question was settled in Kansas, in spite of the protests of his wife (a native of Mississippi) traded his farm for a family of negroes and moved to Missouri."¹²⁵ Whitehead, who had relocated from St. Joseph, Missouri, just across the river, had owned two slaves in 1855 when the territorial census was recorded. James Skaggs, a slaveowner near Lecompton, Douglas County, was reportedly enthusiastic about making Kansas a slave state;

¹²² By voluntary I mean in the absence of duress; for those who had intended to permanently settle in Kansas this was not a pleasant option, but many slaveholders took the protection of their property quite seriously even if the situation was not convenient for their family.

¹²³ Isaac Maris, "Early Reminiscences of North-Eastern Kansas in 1857," undated, in Atchison County Manuscripts, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹²⁴ Zu Adams, "Slaves in Kansas," September 28, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. According to her account, which was carefully researched, Johnson's slaves came over to his Missouri farm seeking protection from Kansas abolitionists but he sent them back to Kansas. It is possible though that her account was based on inaccurate sources.

¹²⁵ Benjamin Harding to Zu Adams, September 9, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives, KSHS.

however, sometime in 1858 Skaggs felt that his property holdings were in danger and he moved to Texas.¹²⁶

Judge John Yocum, who had settled in Franklin County with his family and slaves, left Kansas after being harassed by free-soilers and losing his slave property.¹²⁷ According to reminiscences, J. H. Barlow of Linn County, Kansas, who owned two or three slaves, sent his slaves back to Kentucky when the political environment in Kansas was no longer conducive to slaveholding.¹²⁸ Stories such as this were not unheard of during the later years of the territorial period, although none of the accounts that have survived provide insight into how slaves responded to this unwelcome turn of events. For slaves who had planned an escape on the Underground Railroad, a systematized route organized by abolitionists who lived throughout the Kansas countryside, moving out of the territory was no doubt a blow to their hopes at gaining freedom.

Some of these slaveholders went so far as to sell one or more of their slaves at auctions in Missouri. For instance Cynthia, who had been part of the George Young household located in Topeka, was sent to St. Louis sometime in 1860 or 1861, where she was sold.¹²⁹ Cynthia had only recently come into the possession of John Young (a relative of George Young), and likely Young decided that slavery was no longer a profitable venture, especially after the passage of the Wyandotte Constitution in 1859

¹²⁶ John Speer, "John Speer's Reminiscences of Jas. Skaggs," July 13, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archive Division, KSHS.

¹²⁷ Zu Adams, miscellaneous notations, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹²⁸ Cory, 238.

¹²⁹ Fannie E. Cole to Zu Adams, October 20, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

and overwhelming evidence that Kansas would enter the Union as a free state. We know almost nothing about Cynthia's life, but no doubt she was apprehensive about her sale and feared what might happen after she was sold.

Another alarming example of abolition's negative effect on the local community, at least in the eyes of whites, was when pro-slavery families in Kansas were run off of their claims. When Bowen left Kansas in favor of Westport, Missouri, after his slaves began to acquire a basic education, this exemplified the insecurities of life among abolitionists.¹³⁰ A similar situation occurred in 1856 when a man named Jones, who owned two male slaves, was "compelled" to leave.¹³¹ In these cases, abolitionists and free-soilers could potentially affect slaves' daily experiences in a profound way; being driven away from one's home—however new that home may be—could be a traumatizing experience and no doubt had repercussions that could either mitigate or complicate the horrors of the slave system.

Similarly, in 1856 two families living near Hickory Point (in Jefferson County) were driven away. According to the newspaper article that described these family's plights, "they were not permitted to take with them any of their stock (about 200 head) of cattle or negroes. The negroes, though, afterwards made their escape and followed their masters to this place, and crossed with them into Clay county [Missouri]."¹³² The newspaper editor—knowing full well that stories such as this could strike fear in the hearts of any slaveowner—made sure to highlight what he

¹³⁰ Gen. W. H. Sears, "Negro Slavery in Douglas County," *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 13, 1933, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹³¹ Gen. W. H. Sears, "Negro Slavery in Douglas County," *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 13, 1933, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹³² "Two Pro-Slavery Families Driven Away," *Kansas City Enterprise*, May 31, 1856.

considered the positive element of the story: the slaves refused to cooperate with the abolitionists. The slaves' perspective on the encounter is more difficult to uncover. The article notes that a slave man and slave woman both agreed to remain in the territory (although apparently they rethought this decision later), but "a young negro girl refused to remain with them [the abolitionists], and was, after great irritation, permitted to accompany her master."¹³³ Their motivations are unclear.

Abolitionists and slaves did, however, thwart some of these attempts to protect slave property. Duff Green, who lived in Monrovia (in Atchison County) intended to cross the river into Missouri in order to sell an enslaved woman and her child, but while they stopped at Atchison the two slaves escaped on the underground railroad. The unidentified woman sought assistance from another African American and made her way to the home of Reverend J. H. Byrd who then took her to an abolitionist who could keep her for the night. This abolitionist, George Evans, hid her and her daughter on a platform that was balanced on the cross beams of his cabin's roof. They stayed there for at least two or three days.¹³⁴ Green's motivations for selling this woman and her child are unclear, but it is certainly possible that he understood slaves would not remain secure in Kansas, the irony being that this fact was well demonstrated.¹³⁵ According to an unidentified member of the pro-slavery territorial legislature, "one man saw what was coming in Kansas, sold his farm for about a dozen negroes and moved over into Missouri, where he became a prominent

¹³³ "Two Pro-Slavery Families Driven Away," *Kansas City Enterprise*, May 31, 1856.

¹³⁴ Oertel, 49-50. It is not clear whether this African American ally was also a slave, or whether he or she was part of the free black population.

¹³⁵ Isaac Maris, "Early Reminiscences of North-Eastern Kansas in 1857," undated, in Atchison County Manuscripts, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

slave owner.”¹³⁶ This could no doubt describe any number of slaveholders in the territory. Peter Abell “sought security in other places” in 1861 when war loomed on the horizon, and Carey Whitehead left Doniphan County around the same time as a way to keep abolitionists from stealing his slave property.¹³⁷

The most distressing result of the Bleeding Kansas conflict, for both Missouri and Kansas slaveowners, was an increase in slave escapes.¹³⁸ This was, for slaves, the greatest benefit of the struggle. The rise in movement on the Underground Railroad continued throughout the territorial period, and of course Kansas and Missouri saw even greater numbers of slave escapes during the Civil War. James Montgomery, a radical abolitionist in Linn County, wrote extensively to George Luther Stearns, a Massachusetts businessman, about the fugitive slaves needing passage. In 1860, he informed Stearns that “we have several fugitives on hand, and more are expected. Some of them are from Missouri, and some from Arkansas. When a keen, shrewd fellow comes to us, we send him back for more.”¹³⁹ The slaves that passed through Montgomery’s area, as with those who crossed the border further north near Kansas City or St. Joseph, fully understood the implications of having a predominantly free territory to the west and demonstrated this awareness with their feet. Slaves’ movement into the territory came about through various contexts, but often under the unbridled hope that freedom was close at hand. By escaping from the

¹³⁶ “Slavery in Kansas,” *Topeka Journal*, January 10, 1903.

¹³⁷ Joseph King, “A Brief History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Atchison, Kansas,” *The Patriot*, June 9, 1877, in Atchison County Clippings, vols. 1-2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS; Zu Adams, miscellaneous notations, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹³⁸ The Underground Railroad will receive further treatment in Chapter 4, which addresses social geography on the border.

¹³⁹ James Montgomery to George Luther Stearns, October 6, 1860, in George Luther Stearns Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

bonds of the peculiar institution, slaves demonstrated not only personal agency but also brought to light the fundamental hubris that prevailed among the slaveholding class, a hubris that initially allowed slaveowners to overestimate the strength of the border slave system.

CHAPTER 4

TRACING MOBILITY: THE SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM, 1854-1861

James Montgomery, an abolitionist living near Mound City in Linn County, Kansas, penned a letter to his comrade George Luther Stearns in the fall of 1860, describing the movement of fugitives into the territory. “Times are quiet now, and our lives as safe as they would be in any country,” he wrote. “Fugitives too, are as safe here, as they would be in Canada. Two more have come to us since my last writing.”¹ This letter, only one of many that Montgomery sent to friends in the East, provides a window into how slaves in Missouri and other Southern states moved into Kansas Territory and the aid they found among the local abolitionist population. Although this source comes from the white perspective and inclined toward exaggeration, as do many of the sources related to the Underground Railroad on the Kansas-Missouri line, historians can still tease out useful information about the experiences of the enslaved inhabitants of this region who embraced increased mobility. To that end, this chapter will examine how the social geography of labor on the Kansas-Missouri border exemplified the tension that existed between slaves and slaveowners as they struggled for control over slaves’ mobility. As historical geographer Allan Pred has argued, “place...always involves an appropriation and

¹ James Montgomery to George L. Stearns, November 27, 1860, in George Luther Stearns Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter KSHS).

transformation of space.”² In this case, the border region was defined and transformed by both slaves’ and slaveholders’ manipulations of how enslaved individuals accessed and moved across the landscape. I will illustrate how slave mobility had the potential to dramatically alter the balance of power in this struggle for control over movement and space.

In particular, this chapter will address the practical implementation of three contexts wherein enslaved men and women moved throughout the border region: slave hiring, travel for business (and sometimes pleasure), and escape on the Underground Railroad. Each of these contexts stands apart from other examples of slaves’ mobility because it was through these mechanisms that slaves could potentially gain increased autonomy (even if that independence was only fleeting). Although slavery was indeed a coercive institution that left little room for slaves to maneuver, as historian Anthony Kaye has noted, “despite planters’ attempts to control mobility—by the whip, the law, the slave patrol, and the pass system—slaves forged enduring bonds to adjoining plantations.”³ In the case of the Kansas-Missouri border, small-scale slaveholding in many ways made slave mobility a more frequent component of everyday life than was sometimes the case for African Americans on large plantations in the Deep South that could primarily function as self-sufficient units. Because the average slaveholding in Kansas in 1855 was 2.5 slaves, and the average slaveholding in the Missouri border counties according the 1860 census was 4.5, virtually no slaveholding farm or homestead could function autonomously,

² Allan Pred, “Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74, no. 2 (June 1984), 279.

³ Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 6.

making slaves' movement an integral component of any slaveholder's attempt to make a profit.⁴ In the daily course of business, enslaved men and women ran errands at stores in town, traveled alongside their owners on social calls, and moved throughout the community on their own terms, visiting loved ones or scouting out opportunities for escape. As we saw in Chapter 1, the border was a site where slaveholders sought to reproduce the social and cultural systems that had existed in their home states, and this included attempts to control the slave community by limiting their ability to navigate the physical landscape. This process of formation and reification continued during the Bleeding Kansas period, although slaveholders' attempts to assert control over the slave population were continually foiled as enslaved men and women capitalized on available opportunities to demonstrate their agency with their feet.

Slave Hiring and Shared Resources

Slave hiring was an important avenue for enslaved residents on the border to gain control of their own mobility, since a healthy hiring system existed there as in other locations in the Upper South. Slave hiring was so prevalent that the chances of being hired out were three to five times greater than the chance of being sold, and on the border the hiring of both men and women occurred with some regularity

⁴ See Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 123. According to the 1860 Missouri census, which was the first to record the number of slaveholders, there were 3,165 slaveholders in the seven Missouri counties included in this study. The slave population of those same counties was 14,311.

throughout the antebellum period.⁵ Historians of other Upper South states like Virginia, such as Sarah Hughes, have pointed out that “the hire of slaves introduced flexibility in allocating workers in a diversified rural economy with low profit margins.”⁶ This was certainly true of the situation in Kansas and Missouri. Slave hiring fostered a system wherein slaveholders could ride out the normal fluctuations of the local economy by hiring out slave labor to bring in more cash, or in good times they could gain additional field hands to improve their agricultural profits by putting more acres into cultivation. By hiring out a slave, the owner not only captured the money paid by the hiring party, but also they were no longer responsible for clothing, lodging, and medical expenses for that enslaved individual. Benjamin Stringfellow, who had lived in Weston during the 1830s and 1840s before moving to Kansas, understood the importance of hiring and clearly articulated its benefits in an 1855 letter to the *New York Tribune*. He argued that “those who have more slaves than can be profitably employed in opening a farm, can, in the meantime hire out the remainder, including the women and those too young to render much service in the fencing and breaking the ground.”⁷ Here he specifically referenced how early

⁵ Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman argue that probably fifteen or more percent of slaves in the South were hired out at some point during their life, although this number fluctuated and depended on the region and health of the economy (See Robert W. Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1974], 56). It is difficult to establish concrete percentages of how many slaves were hired out, since census records and slave schedules do not distinguish between hired slaves and those owned by the slaveholder. For further discussion of this dilemma, see R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 238.

⁶ Sarah S. Hughes, “Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, VA, 1782-1810,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 35, no. 2 (April 1978), 261.

⁷ “Kansas—Slavery, Letter from B. F. Stringfellow,” *New York Tribune*, January 27, 1855.

settlers, eager to set up new homes in the territory, could take advantage of the hiring system to benefit their own family's economy.

Also, while his letter did not provide the perspective of enslaved individuals who might be hired out, it is certainly possible that slaves in Missouri welcomed the opportunity to be hired out in Kansas, a state with a developing network for aiding fugitives. For the enslaved individual who was hired out, hiring arrangements could bring opportunities to travel away from home, sometimes for extended periods of time. Even if this newfound mobility did not ultimately lead to flight on the Underground Railroad—which was the ultimate expression of personal autonomy—making connections with sympathetic abolitionists and black communities in other locales could increase slaves' ability to navigate the social and physical terrain.

In a typical slave hiring contract—many of which were drawn up informally on a scrap of paper—the individual who received that slave's labor was only a temporary master and was generally responsible for the hired slave's food, clothing, lodging, and medical bills. For example, an 1853 hiring receipt stated the following: "In consideration of the hirage of a negro boy and girl, I promise to pay G.R. Jacobs sixty nine dollars on or before the first of January next, said negroes I agree to clothe and furnish what is customary to hirelings in the neighborhood, pay taxes, and physician bills in sickness, subscribed to by me this 25th March, 1853."⁸ An enslaved man from Clay County, Missouri, reported that it was customary for a hired bondsman to receive two shirts, two hats, and five pairs of pants per year. In order to

⁸ Receipt for hire of slave Phillis, December 23, 1853, in George Rodney Jacobs Account Book, 1853-1877, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri (hereafter WHMC—C).

maximize their wardrobe, slaves would wear their most worn clothing to the new (temporary) master's home to guarantee that they would receive additional items.⁹

Often the term of hire was a full calendar year, starting on New Year's Day, but for farmers who only needed extra hands during the harvest season the term might be only a few months. As was the case with slave sales, hiring prices depended on the slave's sex, age, health, and ability to perform manual labor. For example, a healthy enslaved man in Missouri might be hired out for anywhere between 75 dollars to 125 dollars (for a full year term).¹⁰ Because hiring was so popular, there was a virtual industry in the area designated specifically for matching willing slaveowners with those who required additional, cheap labor. J. P. Howe and George W. Toler, as one example, posted an advertisement in the *Kansas City Enterprise* to "offer their services to their friends and the public generally, as Agents for the Hiring out of Negroes and Renting houses for the ensuing year."¹¹ Advertisements such as these did not provide any clues as to the feelings or concerns of the slaves whose labor was in such demand, but the frequency of hiring notices illustrates the likelihood that many African Americans on the border can some contact with the hiring system, either directly or indirectly.

Slaves found themselves hired out in a variety of situations. Male slaves who worked as carpenters, blacksmiths, brick masons, or in some other artisan trade, had a

⁹ Jeffrey C. Stone, *Slavery, Southern Culture, and Education in Little Dixie, Missouri, 1820-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 44.

¹⁰ An excellent discussion of slave hiring prices is James William McKettigan, Jr., "Boone County Slaves: Sales, Estate Divisions and Families, 1820-1865, Part II" *Missouri Historical Review* 72 (April 1978), 278. Boone County was in central Missouri and does not fall under the geographic scope of this dissertation, but his calculations are still an excellent guide for estimating slave hiring values in the border counties.

¹¹ "Negroes to Hire!" *Kansas City Enterprise*, December 20, 1856.

particular skill set that was often in high demand. For instance, according to more than one secondhand account in the early twentieth century, the first courthouse in Jackson County, Missouri, located in Independence, was built out of logs hewed by a local enslaved man named Jim Shepherd, who had been hired out to the courthouse's contractor, Daniel P. Lewis.¹² Shepherd was well known throughout the area for his talents, and in fact this courthouse remains standing even today. In this case it is unclear whether Shepherd gained greater mobility from this contract, but his growing reputation within both the African American and white communities could certainly lead to increased opportunities for movement at a later date. Nevertheless, his story illustrates the financial benefits of cultivating skill in an artisan trade.

Slaveholders also hired out female slaves. A schoolteacher at the Shawnee Indian Manual Training School, Ann Archbold, described her students and her living arrangement, stating that "I never had better accommodation anywhere. My washing is done in the best style by a black girl hired on purpose to wash for the Teachers and Preachers of the Institution."¹³ An enslaved woman worked for Axalla Hoole, a pro-slavery emigrant from South Carolina who had been raised in a slaveholding family, doing his and his wife's laundry for two dollars per month.¹⁴ An unidentified female slave, owned by Judge Rush Elmore of Shawnee County, was hired out to cook at a

¹² "The Negro Race in History Hereabouts," *Kansas City Star*, July 11, 1912 in Negroes Clippings, vol. 6, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹³ Ann Archbold to Julia Anne McBride, May 6, 1848, in Indians History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁴ William Stanley Hoole, ed., "A Southerner's Viewpoint of the Kansas Situation, 1856-1857: The Letters of Lieut. Col. A. J. Hoole, C. S. A." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 3 (1934), 51. This article reprints several letters that Hoole wrote to his siblings and parents who remained in South Carolina and were slaveholders themselves.

hotel in Big Springs, just across the border in Douglas County.¹⁵ Margaret Nickens, who dictated her life's narrative as part of the Federal Writer's Project, left her home in northeastern Missouri when she was eight years old to serve as a nurse for the children of Georgia Ann Dawson, who lived in Clay County.¹⁶

Another enslaved woman, Anne Shatteo, was hired out to Hiero Wilson, the sutler at Fort Scott, when Kansas was still Indian Territory.¹⁷ Later she worked for Samuel Lewis, a trader who operated a post on the Neosho River. Her reminiscence, recorded in 1875, notes that in 1847 her owner, John Crisp, gave "Ann, a negro girl, permission to hire her own time from this date, to any person who may be disposed to employ her."¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, Shatteo went with her employer to a new trading post on the Kansas River (also in Indian Territory) when the Pottawatomie moved to their new reservation. After wintering on Blacksmith Creek, Davis located his post at Uniontown, where Shatteo would eventually acquire her freedom.¹⁹ Shatteo most likely worked in the trading post and at home. Her story is an excellent example of how slaves' mobility could come hand in hand with the hiring system.

For a slaveholder one of the great advantages of hiring out one's slaves—as opposed to selling a slave—was that if a slaveowner went into debt and needed

¹⁵ John Speer, "Reminiscences of James Skaggs," July 13, 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁶ "Mag Preaches Thrift," in George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, v. 11, pt. 7, *Missouri Narratives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 263.

¹⁷ A sutler is a civilian trader or merchant who sells general supplies to the U.S. military.

¹⁸ "Aunt Ann's Story, More than Thirty Years in Kansas," May 12, 1875, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁹ "Aunt Ann's Story, More than Thirty Years in Kansas," May 12, 1875, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The certificate of intention stating her eventual emancipation was signed by Lewis on June 1, 1848, with the witnesses being Johnston Lykins and Robert Simerwell (both missionaries in Indian Territory). The official emancipation of Shatteo and her children was signed on March 14, 1849.

additional income, renting out slave labor could be the difference between financial solvency and bankruptcy. It was also relatively common after a slaveowner's death for the estate's administrator or the widow to hire out slaves in order to pay the family's debts. Samuel Reed of Bates County, Missouri, stated in his will that he wanted "the earnings" of Tamar, a female slave, divided among his widow and heirs, and that five years after his death Tamar be emancipated.²⁰ Jesse Overton, a slaveowner in Jackson County, Missouri, gave his executors the authority to hire out a woman named Dinah, although Overton explicitly ordered that she not be sent out of the neighborhood. The reasons for her hire are unclear, but possibly the income from her labors would help pay his debts or the costs of settling the estate.²¹

On occasion other residents along the border—including non-slaveholders—participated in the hiring system. In 1857 Solomon Miller, a journalist and printer from Ohio, settled in Doniphan County, Kansas Territory. Shortly after his arrival, he began publishing the *White Cloud Kansas Chief* and temporarily hired an enslaved boy to assist him with his business.²² Miller's motivations for using slave labor are unclear; he was a dedicated Republican and as such it is unlikely that he supported the spread of slavery into the territory. So was the case with Elijah Lovejoy, the

²⁰ Samuel Reed, Last Will and Testament, March 23, 1850, in Bates County Probate Court Records, Will Book A, Midwest Genealogy Center, Independence (hereafter MGC).

²¹ Jesse Overton, Last Will and Testament, November 16, 1841, in Independence Wills, 1831-1865, MGC.

²² "'Tis Thirty Years Hence," *The Kansas Chief*, June 2, 1887, in Doniphan County Clippings, vols. 1-2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. "Slave hiring" can have one of two meanings. First, hiring or "renting out" a slave can refer to cases where slave owners hired out their slaves and kept all (or most) of the slave's profits. The person in Miller's position—the person who was paying to hire slave labor—was only a temporary master and was generally responsible for the hired slave's food, clothing, lodging, and medical bills. Second, some slaves were allowed to "hire out" their own time in order to earn their freedom. In the case of Solomon Miller's hired slave, the situation is unclear, even though the article in the *Kansas Chief* assumes the former.

famed Illinois abolitionist who, while working at the *St. Louis Times*, had hired an enslaved man named William Wells Brown to assist him. As Brown later recorded in his widely-read narrative, “my work, while with him, was mainly in the printing office, waiting on the hands, working the press, &c.”²³ While there Brown was able to gain an education, and he earned the trust of his supervisors such that they allowed him to run errands independently. Although this last case did not involve the Kansas-Missouri border, it does support the conclusion that even anti-slavery individuals at times hired slaves, for a variety of reasons.

In some cases slaves had the opportunity to hire out their own time, which gave them a right to the income from their labors and allowed them some freedom to choose who they would work for; consequently these men and women had greater control over their own movement. For example John, a thirty-year old barber who belonged to Rush Elmore, reportedly hired out his own time and worked in Lecompton.²⁴ Marcus Freeman, who had come to Jefferson County, Kansas, in 1855 after some time in Kansas City, returned to the Missouri side of the border where he “married and rented my time for \$200.00 a year for seven years until I was emancipated.”²⁵ It appears that the enslaved members of the Little household, in Bourbon County, had a similar experience. At some point a neighbor stopped by the Little house and inquired about hiring some of the young men (at least five or six of

²³ William Wells Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1969), 8.

²⁴ John Sedgwick Freeland reminiscence, “The Slaves of Judge Rush Elmore,” undated, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

²⁵ Marcus Freeman, “Reminiscence of Marcus Lindsay Freeman, A Former Slave,” c. 1895, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

them), and Dr. Little agreed that “they could go if they wished.”²⁶ Instances such as these were not unheard of but they were not the norm for most hired slaves; most men and women who were hired out had little or no choice in the matter and did not receive any compensation for their work.

Sometimes this increased mobility could have far-reaching benefits for the enslaved individual. Thomas Johnson, the head missionary at the Shawnee mission and manual labor school, purchased a young man named Jackson Dempson, who was being sold at auction in Plum Creek, Missouri. After Dempson joined the Johnson household, he hired himself out to work as a cook on various Missouri River steamboats. This allowed Dempson an unprecedented degree of movement across the border landscape and provided various opportunities for him to travel outside his own community. According to Thomas Johnson’s son Alexander, who was also a slaveholder, this easy mobility allowed Dempson to find a wife who was enslaved on a farm in Howard County, Missouri, near the center of the state.²⁷ Slave hiring, then, could foster opportunities to travel and form relationships with individuals who might not normally be a possibility.

This increased mobility as a side effect of the hiring system was also found elsewhere in Missouri. William Wells Brown, who grew up as a slave near St. Louis, was hired out on more than one occasion and amassed a great variety of work experiences. Brown worked in a public house when he was hired out to Major Freeland, a cruel man who Brown described as a “horse-racer, cock-fighter, gambler,

²⁶ H. H. Johnson, “Early Kansas Days,” *Farmer’s Advocate*, March 21, 1879, in unnamed clippings volume, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

²⁷ Alexander S. Johnson, “Slaves in Kansas Territory,” April 20, 1895, in Alexander and Thomas Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

and withal an inveterate drunkard.”²⁸ After Freeland, he worked on more than one Mississippi steamboat, as a servant at the Missouri Hotel owned by John Colburn, as a printer’s assistant at the *St. Louis Times*, and later for James Walker, a slave trader who took Brown with him to the New Orleans slave market.²⁹ Although Brown did not live in western Missouri, his frequent movement into new employment as hired labor provides us with a marvelous illustration of how slave hiring and mobility went hand in hand.

Business Matters

Slaves who accompanied slaveholders on business trips were also a common sight throughout the border region. In fact, in small-scale slaveholding regions such as this, from the white perspective slave mobility was often essential to the daily operations of a farm or business. Bondspeople living near Weston in Platte County, Missouri, regularly drove into town alongside their owners who were running errands or making social calls. Sometimes these individuals were expected to perform labor while in town, but on other occasions they may have been free to socialize with other African Americans and move about town with few limitations.³⁰ For this reason, some city statutes that attempted to limit slaves’ mobility in certain contexts (such as at night when the majority of escapes occurred), still contained a loophole that allowed slaves to travel without censure if that movement was necessary according to the slave’s owner. A city ordinance from Kansas City in 1855, for example,

²⁸ Brown, 5.

²⁹ Brown, 6.

³⁰ Frederick Starr Jr. to unidentified recipient, December 29, 1854, in Frederick Starr Jr. Papers, WHMC—C.

specifically stated that “the master of any slave may give to such slave a pass to any place designated therein, and the Mayor may give a pass to any free negro or mulatto, whose business requires him to be out.”³¹ This ordinance, and any others like it that may have existed elsewhere in the region, were not enforced on a regular basis, as slaves regularly traveled with or without white permission.

This travel for business was not confined to towns within Missouri. According to an article in the *Herald of Freedom*, Missourians had conducted business in Lawrence on a fairly regular basis, selling produce and other goods raised on Missouri farms, and often they brought their slaves along for the journey.³² This trade dwindled during the heat of the border conflict, and presumably slaveholders in Missouri were less keen on bringing their slave property into a free-state community like Lawrence, fearing that the slaves might book passage on the Underground Railroad. In fact, some did just that. Jim Daniels, an enslaved man from Vernon County, Missouri, sought help in 1858 from some abolitionists (including John Brown) across the border in Kansas, crossing over under the pretext of selling brooms. After returning to Missouri he told his owner that he had spent the day in an Osage Indian camp.³³ The fact that Daniels traveled without prior consent—and that his owner apparently took him at his word—illustrates the independence he carved out for himself while enslaved.

According to a later reminiscence a male slave of Richard Cummins, who served as Indian agent for several of the emigrant tribes, had gained his owner’s trust

³¹ “Negroes and Mulattoes,” *Kansas City Enterprise*, November 24, 1855.

³² “The Recoil,” *Herald of Freedom*, January 10, 1857.

³³ *History of Vernon County, Missouri, Written and Compiled from the Most Authentic Official and Private Sources....* (St. Louis: Brown and Company, 1887), 225.

implicitly. In one instance, Cummins had loaded annuity payments for the Sac and Fox into a wagon to transport to the tribe, but at the last minute he was called away on business and simply sent this enslaved man on the errand with no supervision.³⁴ Such opportunities not only gave slaves some independence, but also allowed them to make contact with other enslaved individuals and perhaps even interact with free-soil settlers, abolitionists, or native tribes who supported emancipation.

Alexander Johnson, who had recorded this reminiscence, also noted that his own slaves gained increased independence. Shortly after Kansas opened to white settlement, Johnson moved his wife and children to Missouri (so she could be close to family while he was away on business), and he left his farm in present-day Johnson County, Kansas, in the care of slaves. At this time he had at least seven slaves, and “it took all they produced to keep them, and I had some expenses to pay besides.... They staid there and ran the farm until 1861.”³⁵ Interestingly, these slaves mentioned to Johnson that abolitionists were encouraging them to escape on the Underground Railroad, but the slaves declined the offer; perhaps their independence and relative freedom from white authority, as sole overseers of Johnson’s farm, gave them enough opportunities to make their own way. Being able to independently maintain a farm with little white interference no doubt created new opportunities for these slaves to travel throughout the countryside.

Some enslaved individuals on the border moved well outside of familiar territory. A portion of Jabez Smith’s slaves, who normally lived on one of his

³⁴ Alexander Johnson reminiscence, April 20, 1895, in Alexander and Thomas Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, KSHS.

³⁵ Alexander Johnson reminiscence, April 20, 1895, in Alexander and Thomas Johnson Miscellaneous Collection, KSHS.

farmsteads near Independence, were sent to California on business. According to a letter that Smith wrote to his wife, “eight of the negroes have ran off & will be lost, two of them Thomas has sold, & and has with him Seven.”³⁶ The stories of these individuals have not survived, but it is significant that almost half of that slave company took advantage of the changing situation and made their escape. Because slaveowners and whites sympathetic to their cause had passed legislation that limited slaves’ movements, escape while traveling westward was more likely to have favorable results for the escapee.

The Underground Railroad

The final context shaping slaves’ movement in the border region was their escape from bondage and journey toward freedom. Because this was the most important, long-term embodiment of slave mobility, an examination of the Underground Railroad will consequently form the core of this chapter. Slaves in Kansas and in Missouri did not exist merely as victims of a cruel system—they were also agents of their own independence—and the existence of a strong anti-slavery presence in the territory did much to encourage slaves’ movement on the Underground Railroad.³⁷ Slave escapes occurred on a regular basis throughout the Bleeding Kansas period; Henrietta Buckmaster argued that the number was near 300,

³⁶ Jabez Smith to Ann Eliza Smith, December 19, 1852, in Jabez Smith Family Papers, General Collections, Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Missouri (hereafter JCHS).

³⁷ According to Fergus Bordewich, one possible genesis of this term was with two Pennsylvania abolitionists, Emmor Kimber and Elijah Pennypacker, who were abolitionists and were also supportive of the development of early railroads in the Philadelphia area. Legend, however, states that the term came about after “an irate slave master who after failing to catch a runaway in Ripley, Ohio, is alleged to have exclaimed, ‘He must have gone off on an underground road!’” (Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* [New York: Harper Collins, 2005], 237).

but the exact figure cannot be known with certainty.³⁸ During the pre-territorial days slave escapes had also occurred in limited numbers, but the most active years of the Underground Railroad were from 1857 to 1861, since it was during those years that the white population of Kansas Territory had reached a critical mass of anti-slavery men and women, including those who were willing to serve as conductors.³⁹ As the pro-slavery presence in the state began to wane, railroad activities could take place with more regularity, although it was always prudent to be cautious.

So, who were these fugitives? By all accounts, these runaways came from a variety of situations. Some, like the slaves of Jabez Smith who escaped en route to California, lived on large farms in Missouri, while others escaped from smaller households in Missouri and other states. According to historian Harriet Frazier, if one goes solely on the basis of runaway advertisements in Missouri newspapers, most fugitives were men between the ages of eighteen and fifty, a statistic that is comparable to demographic data on runaways elsewhere in the Upper South.⁴⁰ Women did escape, although many historians (including Frazier) often reference women's decreased mobility that was part and parcel of childbearing and childrearing, which remained the primary domain of enslaved mothers. The presence of children limited their opportunities to escape unless they could bring their

³⁸ Henrietta Buckmaster, *Let My People Go: The Story of the Underground Railroad and Growth of the Abolition Movement* (Boston: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 238-239. Buckmaster was not a trained historian, so her estimate is only a guideline.

³⁹ Richard B. Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible: The Underground Railroad in Lawrence and Douglas County, Kansas, 1854-1865: A Reader* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Division of Continuing Education, 1998), xvi. Sheridan puts the shift at 1857, which as I addressed in Chapter 3, was the height of Southern influence in the territory. See also Sheridan, 30.

⁴⁰ Harriet C. Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves and Those Who Helped Them, 1763-1865* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004), 93.

offspring, which would depend on the children's ages and physical strength. Very few children escaped alone; most came with a relative or acquaintance.

However, it would appear that women did pass through Kansas on the Underground Railroad in significant numbers, since within the surviving reminiscences left by white abolitionists (no accounts from the African American perspective are available), women appear with some regularity. Only a few of these abolitionists mention the presence of children, although in certain high profile escapes women and children played a prominent role. For instance, when John Brown assisted in the escape of ten slaves from Vernon County, Missouri, in late 1858, that group contained several women, including one who was pregnant and who would later give birth on their journey northward.⁴¹

Legislation and Statutes

Like elsewhere in the Upper South, the cardinal rule of the Underground Railroad was secrecy; conductors kept no records and rarely spoke about their activities because the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 directly prohibited any action on the part of Northerners to assist in the escape of fugitive slaves. This statute specified that new federal commissioners could, upon "satisfactory proof being made," sign warrants authorizing the return of any fugitive, regardless of how long that individual had been living as a free person. The law clearly favored slaveholders, since incarcerated slaves could not testify on their own behalf, and slaveowners could

⁴¹ L. L. Kiene, "The Battle of the Spurs and John Brown's Exit from Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903-1904* 8 (1904), 444.

marshal the power of the federal government to retrieve their property; furthermore, commissioners would collect a ten dollar fee for each runaway returned to slavery, but they would only receive five dollars if that slave remained free.⁴² Anyone caught aiding a fugitive could face six months in prison and a \$1,000 fine.⁴³ These stipulations made the Fugitive Slave Law a controversial piece of legislation throughout the North and inflamed abolitionist passions meant that, contrary to its intent, it did little to discourage those who were seriously willing to aid fugitives.

In Missouri, many of the laws from its territorial days remained on the books. A statute from 1804, which was copied almost verbatim from Virginia's slave code, authorized justices of the peace to issue warrants for runaways "lurking in swamps, woods, and other obscure places" and the local sheriff could detain these runaways in jail, with the jailing fee at the expense of the slaveholder.⁴⁴ Because the Missouri River was a particularly appealing escape route, this slave code also stated that any boat pilot who transported a slave without the slaveholder's express permission was liable to a fine.⁴⁵ As Missouri's population grew and local authorities could not always enforce this legislation, additional statutes were added to further restrict slaves' movements. A 1817 statute passed by the Missouri territorial legislature stated that all slaves found traveling without a written pass were assumed to be fugitives, and that any person who found such a slave was obligated to bring that individual before the justice of the peace. If the owner could not be located, the person who recovered this fugitive was responsible for running a newspaper

⁴² Frazier, 102.

⁴³ Sheridan, xvii.

⁴⁴ Frazier, 88.

⁴⁵ Hurt, 255.

advertisement.⁴⁶ These laws remained in effect until the Civil War, and all of these exemplify the government's commitment to protecting slaveowners' interest in limiting slave mobility.

During the Bleeding Kansas period there were at least two bills submitted to the state legislature calling for extensive slave patrols along the border, although neither passed. As early-twentieth-century historian Harrison Trexler has described, the problem so consumed Missouri border counties that in 1857 the Missouri General Assembly appealed to the federal government for additional protection over their property rights as outlined in the Constitution.⁴⁷ Individual towns also took escapes seriously. In November 1855, the City of Kansas (later Kansas City, Missouri) passed an ordinance that severely limited free blacks' mobility within the town's confines, which was one way to curb slave escapes. By requiring all free blacks to have a pass when traveling between the hours of ten o'clock in the evening and four o'clock in the morning, any patroller or slave commissioner who found an African American without a pass might reasonable assume that that individual was a slave.⁴⁸

Furthermore, as yet another sign of Missouri's dedication to supporting slavery, it was actually illegal for the state assembly to pass any emancipation law that did not compensate slaveholders, a mandate that complimented Missouri's harsh treatment of anyone accused of aiding or abetting a fugitive.⁴⁹ Because aiding

⁴⁶ Frazier, 89.

⁴⁷ Harrison Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri, 1804-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1914), 203.

⁴⁸ "Negroes and Mulattoes," *Kansas City Enterprise*, November 24, 1855.

⁴⁹ William B. Napton, Sterling Price, M. Oliver, and S. H. Woodson, *Address to the People of the United States Together with the Proceedings and Resolutions of the Pro-Slavery Convention of Missouri, Held at Lexington, July 1855* (St. Louis: Republican Office, 1855), 8.

fugitives was considered a serious crime, and the escapees themselves rarely spoke of their experiences, concrete historical evidence regarding slaves' journeys toward freedom is sparse, and most accounts veer toward conjecture or are reminiscences recorded in a much later period. To ensure plausible deniability, some conductors did not ask questions of those who appeared seeking refuge. Mary Abbott, who operated a safe house with her husband, recalled later that "the less we knew about them, the easier it would be to answer the questions of the pursuers."⁵⁰

The Kansas territorial legislature, a decidedly pro-slavery body in its earliest incarnations (due to the fraudulent 1855 election), passed a law in 1855 that offered severe punishments for anyone caught aiding escapees. According to section 4, "If any person shall entice, decoy, or carry away out of this Territory, any slave belonging to another, with intent to deprive the owner thereof of the services of such slave, or with intent to effect or procure the freedom of such slave, he shall be adjudged guilty of Grand Larceny, and, on conviction thereof, shall suffer death, or be imprisoned at hard labor for not less than ten years."⁵¹ Even though the territorial legislature's threats were not enforced consistently, abolitionists had every reason to take such threats seriously. As long as the bogus, pro-slavery territorial legislature received official sanction from the federal government, U.S. marshals, military

⁵⁰ Mary Abbott, "Reminiscences of Mrs. J. B. Abbott, De Soto," September 1, 1895, in *Slaves and Slavery Collection*, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵¹ Kansas Territorial Legislature, "An Act to Punish Offences Against Slave Property, Passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Kansas, August 14, 1856" in *General Pamphlets Collection*, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. This was signed by J. H. Stringfellow, Speaker of the House, and Thomas Johnson, President of the Council.

officers, and other agents of the pro-slavery party could legally apprehend fugitives.⁵² This meant that the United States government was now even more engaged in the business of limiting slaves' mobility and cowering to Southern pressure, a realization which in many cases radicalized abolitionists and made them even more convinced that slavery was a coercive system with a far-reaching grasp.

Reasons for Escape

Fugitives' rationales for running away varied greatly, and unfortunately the stories of many of these brave individuals have not survived, or they have only been kept alive in the reminiscences of the abolitionists who aided their escapes. These white reminiscences often focus on the good deeds of abolitionists (being decidedly self-congratulatory), but it is still possible to uncover some feelings and motivations of the enslaved men and women who embarked on these hazardous journeys.

In some cases exposure to educational opportunities, and the ensuing ability to read and write, inspired Missouri bondspeople to break free from slavery (much as Frederick Douglass did in Maryland). An unidentified slave of Peter Abell who lived in Weston learned how to read, write, and interpret a compass to navigate the countryside. Having access to this gave him greater control over his own movements and a greater chance of making it north, so much so that he took two companions (slaves of Jack Vineyard) with him. The exact particulars of this case are unclear, but in the words of one local abolitionist, Abell was convinced that "slavery [was] the

⁵² Theodore W. Morse, "The 'Underground Railroad' in Kansas," in Theodore Morse Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

best thing that ever either spontaneously grew, or was ingeniously contrived and made.”⁵³ Having gained an education, this enslaved man might have chafed against his owner’s unwavering stance and found that slavery became even more unbearable.

Some fugitives took advantage of their owner’s absence. An enslaved man named George escaped with his wife Fanny and their three children in 1858. Lewis Bodwell, a Congregational minister living in Topeka, assisted them in their escape to Nebraska. According to his later reminiscence, George and Fanny chose to flee Leavenworth after George’s owner, a military officer, was relocated to a different assignment and Fanny’s owner, a woman from Alabama, had returned south. Bodwell wrote that, “the master far west, the mistress far south, some good friends near, and their only responsible keeper having her cares and duties taking precedence of this, truly ‘the cat was away and the mice might play.’”⁵⁴ In this case, the entire family made it safely to freedom.

In another instance, a group of slaves in Missouri escaped to avoid being separated by sale. In 1858 Jim Daniels of Vernon County discovered that he, his wife Narcissa, and his children were soon going to be sold as part of an estate sale. Often, in sales such as these, families would be separated and would likely never see each other again. For the Daniels family, escape would have to happen quickly if they were to stay together, and so Daniels contacted John Brown’s nearby camp to seek

⁵³ Frederick Starr Jr. to Father [Frederick Starr Sr.], September 19, 1854, in Frederick Starr Jr. Papers, WHMC—C.

⁵⁴ Lewis Bodwell, “A Home Missionary Journey Never Before Reported,” *The Kansas Telephone*, August 1893. It is not clear whether or not this entire article comes from Bodwell’s journal, or if he added elaborations before publishing it in the newspaper. Although Bodwell never explicitly states that they had lived in Leavenworth, the fact that George’s owner was a military officer, coupled with a reference to George working at “The Planters” (a hotel in Leavenworth), makes their presence in that town very likely. It appears that George worked as a house servant while Fanny was a laundress.

assistance.⁵⁵ This was also the case with Napoleon Simpson, a fugitive from Jackson County, Missouri, who spent some time at the Joseph Gardner home near Lawrence. According to a later reminiscence left by Gardner's son, Simpson had been sold to a slave trader who took slaves south, and he escaped to Iowa but then returned to the border hoping to save his wife and children.⁵⁶

At other times, enslaved men and women on the Missouri side of the line had prior contact with abolitionists; some of these individuals had perhaps been contemplating escape for days or months, while others found a new hope in those who offered to guide them out of slavery. In the Bill Remington household in Platte County, "the slaves gathered at night around their cabins and talked about the great promises made them."⁵⁷ Some of those individuals crossed over into Kansas, including Lizzie Allen, whose memories were recorded (albeit second hand) in a *Leavenworth Times* article.⁵⁸ Some former slaves told their conductors that "they never would have known anything about a land of freedom or that they had a friend in the world only from their master's continual abuse of the Lawrence abolit[ionist]s."⁵⁹ Slaveowners' fears that abolitionists might exert undue influence over the slave population were, then, not entirely unfounded. Abolitionists were indeed working

⁵⁵ *History of Vernon County, Missouri, Written and Compiled from the Most Authentic Official and Private Sources....* (St. Louis: Brown and Company, 1887), 225. According to this history, they were going to be hired out in Jackson and Lafayette counties to the north, by request of the administrator of James Lawrence's estate. This history provides additional details of the Brown raid, but it was most assuredly written from the Missouri perspective, which is especially visible in its disdain for Brown and his allies.

⁵⁶ Theodore Gardner, "The Last Battle of the Border War," in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 65.

⁵⁷ Allan E. Paris, "Life of 100-Year-Old Lizzie Allen Reflects History of Leavenworth," *Leavenworth Times*, July 2, 1939, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁸ Allan E. Paris, "Life of 100-Year-Old Lizzie Allen Reflects History of Leavenworth," *Leavenworth Times*, July 2, 1939, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁹ John Bowles to Franklin B. Sanborn, April 4, 1859, in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 52.

alongside African Americans to increase slaves' chances of controlling their own movements across the landscape.

One white Kansas abolitionist, James Abbott, spoke later about some of the fugitives' reasons for escaping. If a Missouri slaveowner truly believed that his property was being threatened, and determined to move further south, the bondspeople within that household would often "make an effort to secure his freedom before the difficulties were increased and the opportunities were gone."⁶⁰

Frederick Starr, a Presbyterian minister in Weston, Missouri, taught some slaves how to read and write, and as a proponent of emancipation he perhaps spoke with those men and women about abolition.⁶¹ Abolitionist John E. Stewart was particularly creative in his methods of conversing with Missouri slaves. He reportedly traveled among Missouri border communities with a peddler's pack, "but instead of selling goods, he soon begins talking of freedom and Canada."⁶² For anyone who wished to join Stewart, he brought along a wagon and team that he hid in the woods until the group could depart safely under cover of darkness.

Of course, white abolitionists in the territory were not the only ones to encourage slave escapes. One unidentified former slave helped at least twenty-five bondspeople to freedom, and the useful information he shared with other individuals

⁶⁰ James B. Abbott, "The Rescue of Dr. John W. Doy," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 4 (1890), 312.

⁶¹ William M. Paxton, *The Annals of Platte County, Missouri* (Kansas City: Hudson Kimberly Publications, 1897), 215. Starr insisted on more than one occasion, when questioned by pro-slavery men in Weston, that he believed slavery a moral evil but that he was a colonizationist, not an abolitionist. Nevertheless, his actions in the community (including an instance where he spoke to a slaveowner about potentially freeing one of his slaves) continued to make him the target of anti-abolitionist attacks. See, for example, his letter of February 22, 1855, in Frederick Starr Jr. Papers, WHMC—C.

⁶² Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 47.

no doubt allowed other slaves to follow in his stead.⁶³ An abolitionist named John Bowles noted that, of these fugitives, “none ever failed to be a successful missionary in the cause.”⁶⁴ African Americans’ dedication in this matter came out of their own experiences with racial discrimination and abuse from white society, whether they had been born free or born into bondage. It is no surprise, then, that they were active participants in the railroad system (even if their own words have not survived the passage of time). It was for this reason that pro-slavery supporters in both Kansas and Missouri were suspicious of free blacks. In early 1855 the Platte County Self-Defensive Association, staunchly supportive of slaveowners’ interests, notified the free blacks living in Weston that they must leave within the month or face a whipping. This was the same organization that organized a night patrol in the fall of 1854 to limit slaves’ mobility and keep an eye on abolitionists who may be agents on the Underground Railroad.⁶⁵ This association did much to curb slaves’ movements in the border region. Some citizens of the town resisted this and, after rumors circulated that armed men were coming to forcibly expel these freedmen and freedwomen, they formulated a plan to defend the town. The attack never occurred, but this incident points to the heated animosity between members of the Self Defensives and the average citizenry of the county.⁶⁶ Among the white population there was not a

⁶³ John Bowles to Franklin Sanborn, April 4, 1859, in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 52.

⁶⁴ John Bowles to Franklin Sanborn, April 4, 1859, in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 52.

⁶⁵ Frederick Starr Jr. to Family, October 18, 1854, in Frederick Starr Jr. Papers, WHMC—C. In Starr’s words, “this patrol was very quickly made up, many notorious nigger whoremasters volunteering their services in order to get the pay and the better to prow around any of the negro cabins and enter them at their option for their own purposes.” The not so subtle implication here was that these patrollers were seeking more opportunities to assault enslaved women.

⁶⁶ Frederick Starr Jr. to Father [Frederick Starr Sr.], February 26, 1855, in Frederick Starr Jr. Papers, WHMC—C. While in this instance the citizens of Weston allied themselves with the free black community, only ten days later they notified an African American barber that he should leave St.

consensus on the issue of how slaves' and free blacks' movements should be restricted and who was responsible for enforcing those limits.

Travel Routes

In order to ensure the secrecy (and thus the efficacy) of these passages to freedom, the travel routes varied depending upon the starting location on the Kansas-Missouri border. Richard Sheridan maintains that most Missouri slaves crossed overland in the counties south of the Kansas City area, although those north of the river could sometimes travel across the Missouri by building a raft, swimming, or crossing on the ice during the winter.⁶⁷ Generally fugitives traveled on foot, but sometimes they acquired some form of transportation.⁶⁸ According to later accounts, there were two standard routes that might be modified when necessary; the first, or "northern" route, began in Quindaro and proceeded to Lawrence, then to Oskaloosa or Topeka, and finally Holton before crossing into Nebraska. For those taking the northern path, sympathetic help might be found in the Quaker community, including the home of Ransom Harris, near Pardee in Atchison County.⁶⁹ Within Lawrence's city limits, several sites existed including the homes of James Lane and James Abbott in town, and other spots that saw less action, like the home of Richard Cordley,

Joseph; reportedly he had a gambling addiction and problems with alcoholism that made him a nuisance. There is no way to tell whether this man was indeed causing unrest within the community, but with the prevalent racism of the day it is probable that white "troublemakers" would not have received the same treatment.

⁶⁷ Sheridan, xv-xvi.

⁶⁸ I base this conclusion on the fact that the majority of runaway advertisements in Missouri newspapers make no mention of the runaway stealing a horse or wagon in order to escape; since slaveowners valued their livestock one might assume that, had fugitives taken horses, slaveholders would find that an important detail to include in their description of the runaway.

⁶⁹ "The Underground Railroad in Kansas," *Kansas City Star*, July 2, 1905, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

minister of the Plymouth Congregational Church and later author of the history of Lawrence. Annie Soule Prentiss, whose father Amasa Soule operated a station near Palmyra just a few miles south of Lawrence, later wrote that her father “would always take in all the Negroes he could.”⁷⁰ John E. Stewart, a radical abolitionist known as the “fighting preacher,” also lived south of town and helped many fugitives find safety in the north, as did John Doy and Joseph Gardner. Joel Grover’s barn, completed sometime in 1858, was another key hiding place for fugitive slaves, and many conductors including John Brown spent time on the Grover farm. Today, the barn is part of Fire Station No. 4, although recently local historians have sought permission to turn the barn into a museum memorializing Lawrence’s crucial role in aiding fugitives.⁷¹

The second, or “southern” route, often began in Mound City (Linn County), and then went northward to Topeka and Holton.⁷² In southern Kansas, several abolitionists including Zeke Downing, James Montgomery, John E. Stewart, and John Brown were particularly active in aiding slave escapes. Once the fugitives made their way further north and deeper into the territory, “Topeka was the rallying point of the line.”⁷³ In 1856, during the most active years of violence over the slavery question, Missourians attempted to curb further Northern emigration by preventing free-state emigrants or their materiel from entering Kansas Territory via Missouri. During this

⁷⁰ Annie Soule Prentiss, “Recollections of the Underground Railroad,” in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 42.

⁷¹ Nancy Smith, “The ‘Liberty Line’ in Lawrence, Kansas Territory,” in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 3.

⁷² “The First Railroad in Kansas,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 14, 1906.

⁷³ George Allen Root, “Underground Railroad,” undated, in George Allen Root Papers, KSHS. Root was an amateur historian at the turn of the twentieth century who spoke with Kansas old timers and compiled reminiscences of their work on the Underground Railroad.

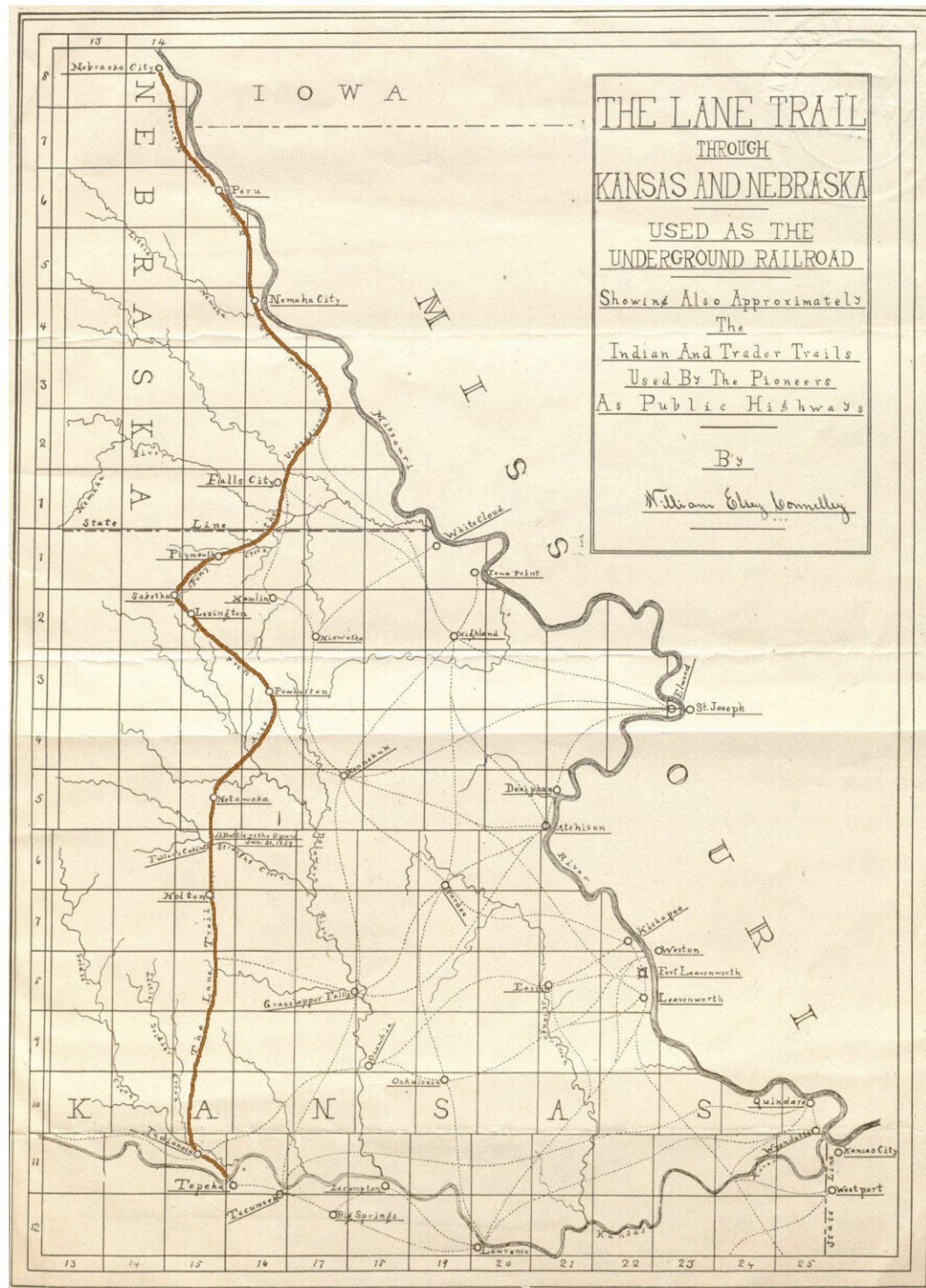
Missouri blockade, James Lane pioneered a route that allowed eastern travelers to avoid Missouri altogether by journeying through Tabor, Iowa, then westward into Nebraska and down to Kansas, effectively avoiding the potential pitfalls that might befall travelers seeking passage across the Kansas-Missouri border.⁷⁴ This route, known as the Lane Trail, became a major route on the Underground Railroad. Besides Lawrence, Topeka was perhaps the most active hub of railroad activity, thanks to its key location as the starting point on the Lane Trail. Three prominent places of refuge were the homes of John Armstrong, Daniel Sheridan, and John Ritchie. John Armstrong constructed a two story stone house (with a basement) sometime in 1856, located on what is now the northwest corner of Quincy Street and Fifth Street in downtown Topeka; he shared this with the Scales family who operated a boarding house. Because his home was located near the Kansas River, which must be traversed if one was using the Lane Trail, he would ferry fugitives and their white guides over the river.⁷⁵ Daniel Sheridan lived in the present-day Highland Park neighborhood on a farm owned by Mrs. Curry; at the time, this site was approximately two and a half miles south of town.⁷⁶ Both of these abolitionists gained a reputation throughout the community as persons willing to aid fugitives and other conductors, particularly John Brown who was often linked to these safe houses in Topeka.

⁷⁴ Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, xvi-xvii.

⁷⁵ Richard A. Swallow, "Fleeing Slaves Were Hidden in Topeka Building," *Topeka Capital*, April 21, 1929, in Shawnee County Clippings, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁶ George Allen Root, miscellaneous notations, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. There were several newspapers articles in the *Topeka Capital* in the 1930s regarding whether or not buildings on this property (at 2303 Pennsylvania Avenue) should be torn down. See, for example, "Pre-Civil War Monument Will Stay on Present Site," *Topeka Capital*, April 21, 1939.

Figure 10: The Lane Trail and Underground Railroad Routes



Reprinted courtesy of the Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.
 The author has highlighted the Lane Trail in brown.

John Ritchie's house, which still stands at 1116 N. Madison in downtown Topeka, was another key location where slaves sequestered themselves before passage further north.⁷⁷ John and his wife Mary were well-known in the surrounding community for their abolitionist beliefs, making their home a target for pro-slavery military operations intended to capture fugitives. Ritchie was briefly imprisoned in Lecompton, alongside other free-state activists like Charles Robinson, and then in 1860 he killed a U.S. marshal named Leonard Arms who attempted to search his property without a warrant.⁷⁸

In some cases, these abolitionists had prior experience with shepherding fugitives to safety. Quakers were some of the early conductors on railroad routes elsewhere in the United States, and the Quaker community near Pardee reportedly came from Springdale, Iowa, known for its abolitionist leanings.⁷⁹ John Brown, who spent time in Osawatomie with his half-sister Florella Adair and her husband Samuel, had participated in Underground Railroad activities while living in Ohio, as had Augustus Wattles who maintained one of the few safe houses in Linn County, Kansas.⁸⁰ Cyrus Flanders, who lived in Shawnee County, Kansas, reportedly assisted in the attempted rescue of Anthony Burns, a free black man in Boston who was taken

⁷⁷ For additional discussion of how the Shawnee County Historical Society is working to preserve Ritchie's legacy, see John Hanna, "House a Key Link in Free State History," *Lawrence Journal World*, May 30, 2006, and Glenda Overstreet, "Ritchie House Meaningful Landmark; House Rich with History," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, February 3, 2008.

⁷⁸ William O. Wagon, "Wrecking Slavery from the Kansas Territory: The 'Topeka Boys' as Saboteurs, 1855-1861," unpublished paper presented at the 48th Annual Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha, Nebraska, March 4, 2005.

⁷⁹ "The Underground Railroad in Kansas," *Kansas City Star*, July 2, 1905, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸⁰ Theodore Morse, "The 'Underground Railroad' in Kansas," in Theodore Morse Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

back into slavery under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Law.⁸¹ Thus, while pro-slavery partisans brought their own views on slave mobility out to the Kansas-Missouri border, so too did abolitionists who hoped to improve slaves' opportunity to independently navigate the landscape.

Settling in Kansas

In addition to the presence of sympathetic and unflinchingly discreet conductors willing to aid fugitives, some towns in the territory gained a reputation as a friendly place for black settlement, providing these men and women with a network of support should a slaveowner or vigilante seeking bounty come looking for them. One such town was Lawrence, where several safe houses existed both within the town limits and beyond. In the words of one former conductor, "Lawrence has been (from the first settlement of Kansas), known and cursed by all slave holders in and out of Mo. [Missouri] for being an abolition town."⁸² The several individuals that John Doy hoped to assist out of the territory had all made new lives for themselves in Lawrence. By 1860 Joseph Gardner had felt that fugitives would be safe enough in Lawrence, so he hired some escaped slaves from Jackson County, Missouri, to help him quarry rocks for building fence posts. These men were not safe, it turned out, since pro-slavery men in the vicinity formed a posse that came out and attacked Gardner's home.⁸³ Reverend Richard Cordley, minister of the Plymouth Congregational Church

⁸¹ George E. Flanders, "Early Kansas Reminiscences," undated, in Shawnee County History, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸² John Bowles to Franklin Sanborn, April 4, 1859, in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 52.

⁸³ Theodore Gardner, "The Last Battle of the Border War," in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 60.

in Lawrence, helped hid a fugitive named Lizzie who stayed in the area for an extended period of time.⁸⁴

Another safe haven for fugitives was Quindaro. Abelard Guthrie (whose wife was Wyandot) and some New England abolitionists founded the town in 1856, intending the site to be a safe docking point for free-staters trying to enter the territory through hostile Missouri.⁸⁵ According to historian Harriet Frazier, the town especially welcomed fugitives from Platte County, Missouri, which lay just across the river.⁸⁶ Orrin Murray's grandfather escaped with his family on a skiff that he rowed across the Missouri River. The Murray family stayed in the area, and Orrin lived only a few blocks from Quindaro's ruins in what is now Kansas City, Kansas.⁸⁷

Even towns in Kansas that had a reputation for being a stronghold of pro-slavery settlement—like Leavenworth—had a significant free black community that could lend support for fugitives seeking a new life in the territory. According to the 1860 census, of the 625 free black persons residing in Kansas, 295 of those were in Leavenworth County.⁸⁸ The hustle and bustle surrounding the fort, along with the town's position just across the Missouri River from Platte County, made it a prime

⁸⁴ Richard B. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contraband into Kansas, 1854-1865" *Kansas History* 12 (Spring 1989), 31.

⁸⁵ "Kansas Town's Ruins Hold Tales of Time Slaves Fled to Freedom," in Miscellaneous Quindaro Publications, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter SRL).

⁸⁶ Frazier, 176. Quindaro was only in existence from 1856 to 1862. Today the ruins of Quindaro lay within the limits of Kansas City, Kansas, although the National Parks Service has listed it on the National Register of Historic Places. For a lengthier examination of the town's significance in territorial history, see Jeff R. Bremer, "'A Species of Town-Building Madness': Quindaro and Kansas Territory, 1856-1862" *Kansas History* 25 (Autumn 2003): 156-171.

⁸⁷ "Kansas Town's Ruins Hold Tales of Time Slaves Fled to Freedom," in Miscellaneous Quindaro Publications, Kansas Collection, SRL).

⁸⁸ U. S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Population Schedules (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864). The next closest county was Bourbon, which only had 65. Free black communities primarily formed in urban areas, making it likely that Fort Scott contained many of those 65 individuals.

location for free black settlement, but a precarious one for fugitives who could not blend into the population or create forged free papers. For instance Charley Fisher, who escaped from Kentucky, worked at the barber shop within the Planter's House hotel, one of the most notable establishments in Leavenworth at the time. His owner received word of Fisher's whereabouts and pursued him, but Fisher was able to escape with help from the white community.⁸⁹

Experiences En Route

Although slaves' experiences while traveling on the Underground Railroad have only survived within the reminiscences of white abolitionists, historians can still get some sense of what these men, women, and children encountered while traveling. A mother and her two children ended up at Harrison Hannah's station in Shawnee County. In order to get past the prying eyes on the roadsides of Topeka, the young boy was stuck underneath the wagon seat where his head was repeatedly bumped against the wagon's floor as they drove along the rough roads; even though the journey was painfully unpleasant he understood the seriousness of the situation and managed to keep quiet. The woman hid her face behind a veil and disguised her daughter's appearance, but no doubt all three were extremely apprehensive, especially as the mother worried about her son's possible injuries.⁹⁰

Fugitives dealt with various hardships along their journey. A family of five (George, Fanny, and their three children) who passed through the Ritchie home in

⁸⁹ "History Made There; The Planters' House at Leavenworth Sold at Auction," *Topeka Capital*, June 7, 1903, in Leavenworth County Clippings, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁰ Harrison Hannahs to Harvey D. Rice, July 27, 1896, in Harrison Hannahs Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

1858 had Lewis Bodwell as their escort on the Lane Trail. The party encountered severe rain throughout their journey, and although on one night Fanny and her children found shelter inside a small log cabin, George, Lewis, and another guide named Emerson had to bunk in the wagon bed. Two days later, on the banks of the Nemaha River, they found that the river was too high and they were forced to go well out of their way to seek a shallower crossing. Because of this unexpected detour they ran out of provisions.⁹¹ The rest of their journey presented similar difficulties, and the fugitives were emotionally taxed and physically stressed, constantly fearful that these setbacks might result in their capture.

Perhaps the most famous example of a daring escape fraught with challenges is that of John Brown's December 1858 raid into western Missouri, where he helped free eleven slaves who lived on farms in Vernon County. Brown and the main element of his force went to the farm of James Lawrence (who had died and willed the estate to his son-in-law, Harvey Hicklan) on the north side of the Little Osage River, where Jim Daniels, his wife and children, and another slave man named Sam were held in bondage. Meanwhile Aaron D. Stevens, a member of Brown's band (who would later join Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia), took a smaller party to farms located south of the river.

The perspective of the bondspeople on these farms has not survived, but for those such as the Daniels family who expected Brown's arrival, the few days prior to the event were no doubt full of anticipation and fear that these white abolitionists may

⁹¹ Lewis Bodwell, "A Home Missionary Journey Never Before Reported," *The Kansas Telephone*, August 1893.

not follow through on their promises. Once Brown and his posse arrived to aid the slaves on the former Lawrence farm, Daniels began separating out all the personal property belonging to the estate so that the fugitives could bring some essential supplies. According to George Gill, a member of Brown's party, both Brown and these bondspeople considered this property "as being owned by the slaves, having surely been bought with their labor.... They, the slaves, were the creators of the whole, and were entitled it, not only as their own, but from necessity."⁹² Two slaves joined Daniels, his wife, and their two children, although it is not clear whether these slaves knew about the raid in advance or decided spontaneously to make their escape.⁹³ In any case, these individuals came out of slavery with more possessions than the average fugitive, including two horses, a wagon, cattle, bedding, clothes, and other miscellaneous belongings and foodstuffs.⁹⁴ After finishing up at Lawrence's place, the group headed to the home of a slaveowner named John B. LaRue, and apparently the slaves on this farm did not have advanced notice. Nevertheless, five more enslaved persons gained their freedom, and as before, they took with them much needed possessions like horses, clothing, and food.⁹⁵ One can only guess at the

⁹² Richard J. Hinton and George B. Gill, "John Brown and the Rescue of Missouri Slaves" in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 80.

⁹³ According to Llewellyn Kiene's account, these fugitives did not have proper clothing or shoes until abolitionists found some spare items to share, which supports the conclusion that some of these individuals left home in a hurry. See L. L. Kiene, "The Battle of the Spurs and John Brown's Exit from Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903-1904* 8 (1904), 444-445.

⁹⁴ Richard J. Hinton and George B. Gill, "John Brown and the Rescue of Missouri Slaves" in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 80.

⁹⁵ John Brown to Gents, January 1859, in John Brown Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. This letter is known as "Old Brown's Parallels." According to a published history of Vernon County from 1887, some of these slaves were seen weeping, which led the author(s) of that history to conclude that these individuals were taken against their will. The other plausible interpretation, however, is that these fugitives were crying tears of joy (or of course, perhaps they were not crying at all and that fact was an apocryphal addition to the local lore surrounding the Brown raid). See *History of Vernon*

reactions of these people who suddenly found themselves in a position to gain their freedom, becoming increasingly mobile as a result.

Figure 11: Samuel and Jane Harper



Samuel and Jane Harper were two of the enslaved individuals who John Brown helped free in 1858. They eventually settled in the growing free black community in Windsor, Ontario. Photo courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

County, Missouri, Written and Compiled from the Most Authentic Official and Private Sources.... (St. Louis: Brown and Company, 1887), 230.

In the interim, Stevens' party had liberated a woman named Jane (later Jane Harper) but in the process they killed her (former) owner, David Cruise. According to early historian Wilbur Siebert, Jane stated that "her master would certainly have fired upon the intruders had not Whipple [Stevens] used his revolver first, with deadly effect."⁹⁶ This is the only time that Jane's perspective is available within the historical record, and it illustrates how enslaved individuals fully understood that slaveowners were willing to resist abolitionists with force when necessary. Stevens' actions on the Cruise farm infuriated the slaveholding community in surrounding areas, and consequently the governor of Missouri put out a 3,000 dollar bounty on Brown's head that led proslavery vigilantes to track the group's movement north.⁹⁷ Brown and the fugitives made their way deeper into Kansas and, after spending time in Osawatomie (at the home of Brown's brother-in-law Samuel Adair), they moved northward and spent the night at Joel Grover's barn in Douglas County. From there they bunked down in a makeshift barricade known as Bain's fort, before going to Topeka and joining the Lane Trail.

One later reminiscence described the fugitives' frame of mind during the ordeal. Cyrus Packard's daughter Olive Owen, who witnessed her father's abolitionist work, recalled that "they were quite a jolly set."⁹⁸ This was even the case after they had slept outside in wagons hidden behind some thick brush near the Packard home (at Kansapolis, now known as Rochester). The group set out again

⁹⁶ Wilbur Henry Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 163. It appears that Siebert took this quotation from some other account; it is unclear whether Siebert ever interviewed Jane Harper personally.

⁹⁷ Eugene Morrow Violette, *A History of Missouri* (D.C. Heath and Company, 1918), 320.

⁹⁸ Olive Owen, "Some Remembrances of the Underground Railroad," 1908, in Shawnee County History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

before daylight. Both the U.S. military and independent bounty hunters were hot on their heels, and after a lengthy pursuit the two parties met just north of Holton at what became known as the Battle of the Spurs.⁹⁹ The fugitives made it to safety in Nebraska and Iowa, before being escorted to Canada.¹⁰⁰ According to James Redpath, this incident spurred an increase in escapes, because in the Missouri border counties there was mass panic and while slaveholders planned to sell their property or move it elsewhere, African Americans took advantage of the chaos and escaped in large numbers.¹⁰¹ In that sense, Jim Daniel's desperate plea for help precipitated a chain of events that would ultimately lead to freedom for other bondspeople, some of whom likely made their way through Kansas.

Attempts to Curb Slave Escapes

Slaves' movements within and out of the border region had always been under close watch from the pro-slavery communities in both Kansas and Missouri, but with increased activity on the Underground Railroad slavery's supporters intensified their efforts to recapture fugitives. Some of the most dedicated efforts came, unsurprisingly, from slaveholders themselves. The quickest, and perhaps most effective method of retrieving slave property was to post a notice in the local newspaper. Although runaway advertisements rarely referenced the reasons for an enslaved person's flight, they did provide other descriptive details that can provide

⁹⁹ Richard J. Hinton and George B. Gill, "John Brown and the Rescue of Missouri Slaves" in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 82-84.

¹⁰⁰ Frazier, 146. All told, the journey took almost three months and the fugitives traveled approximately 2,500 miles.

¹⁰¹ Sheridan, 9-10.

context, such as what the individual was wearing, what provisions they had at their disposal, and the presumed direction they were traveling. These notices naturally carried a monetary award as an incentive.

In addition to posting runaway notices in local newspapers, slaveowners sometimes came to Kansas (or sent a representative in their stead) to retrieve what they considered their chattel. Under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Law, no escaped slave was safe within the United States' borders and slaveowners who could marshal the funds to mount a pursuit would receive full support from the military (and, technically, the regular citizenry were also obligated to help). This was especially true on the Kansas-Missouri border, where the volatile political situation during Bleeding Kansas was a clear threat to slaveowners' property. As R. Douglas Hurt asserted, "slavery by its very nature required firm control to maintain discipline and to prevent trouble from a host of sources."¹⁰² Isaiah Brown, a slaveowner who lived just a few miles across the border in Missouri, came to abolitionist Zeke Downing's house near Ottawa (in Franklin County) seeking news about any runaway slaves in the area. Downing denied seeing anyone in the vicinity, but Brown did not take him at his word and they looked around the property thoroughly before returning to the Missouri side of the line.¹⁰³

One of the more noteworthy examples of the Fugitive Slave Law's implementation occurred in 1859, when Charley Fisher's owner from Kentucky came up to arrest Fisher in Leavenworth. Local abolitionists refused to acquiesce when the

¹⁰² R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 246.

¹⁰³ A. Ellis, "Editor, Chautauqua Journal," in *Negroes Clippings*, vols. 1-2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

owner demanded that Fisher be jailed until his case could be heard by the slave commissioner, so Fisher was put under guard at the Planter's Hotel. Later, during the recess during his court hearing, Fisher escaped and his owner left the state empty handed.¹⁰⁴ From Leavenworth he had made his way to Reverend Hugh Dunn Fisher's home in Lawrence before heading to Canada, but on the way he was eventually captured and sold in the New Orleans market, remaining in the Deep South until the Civil War. After the hostilities ended Fisher made his way back to Lawrence where he reunited with his abolitionist allies.¹⁰⁵

In addition to fearing discovery from a slaveowner, fugitives also had to keep an eye out for slave catchers who would cross the border and kidnap slaves or free blacks in order to sell them for a profit. Such an incident occurred in 1860. A free black man, who had been in the Lawrence area for two years and was staying with abolitionist John E. Stewart, was accosted in a field and the kidnappers began beating him with a club to silence his cries for help as he was carried off. Stewart and a fellow conductor named Amasa Soule rushed to this man's aid, and in the process Stewart took a bullet in the hip. Soule's account does not divulge whether or not Stewart was able to successfully fend off the kidnappers, but hopefully this young man was able to get away.¹⁰⁶ There were others like him, though, who were most certainly not successful in evading capture.

¹⁰⁴ "History Made There; The Planters' House at Leavenworth Sold at Auction," *Topeka Capital*, June 7, 1903, in Leavenworth County Clippings, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Dunn Fisher, *The Gun and the Gospel: Early Kansas and Chaplain Fisher* (Chicago: The Kenwood Press, 1896), 148. Reverend Fisher was not related to Charley Fisher.

¹⁰⁶ Sheridan, 131-132.

A similar event occurred near Topeka where a pro-slavery man named Isaac Edwards captured a lone fugitive named Felix and headed toward the town of Tecumseh, which lay just west of Topeka. When word of this spread to the local abolitionist community, several railroad conductors including John Ritchie and John Armstrong moved to intercept but were unsuccessful. Felix escaped successfully near Leavenworth and came back to Topeka, a story that illustrates not only slaves' determination in becoming free but also their ability to navigate the landscape and use that knowledge to their advantage.¹⁰⁷

Because the federal government officially recognized the pro-slavery legislature in Kansas Territory, even though it was elected fraudulently, military officers and other members of law enforcement were often involved in apprehending fugitives. This occurred with some regularity throughout the Bleeding Kansas period. "The United States Government officials were working hand in glove to make Kansas a slave state," as one free-state man recalled later, so in accordance "the government officials at Leavenworth often sent United States soldiers out to hunt for and capture runaway slaves, that, all of us objected to."¹⁰⁸ In 1857, an article in the *Kansas Herald of Freedom* described a group of soldiers who attempted to force their way into John Ritchie's home in Topeka, reportedly without written permission (such as a warrant), but luckily no slaves were found within. The article asked, "how long our citizens are to be harassed in this way, the sanctity of their dwellings outraged,

¹⁰⁷ Shawnee County Historical Society, "Underground Railroad in Topeka," *Bulletin of the Shawnee County Historical Society* no. 15 (December 1951), 15.

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin Van Horn to George W. Martin, undated, in Benjamin Van Horn Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

themselves subjected to pillage and insult.”¹⁰⁹ Only a few years later, Ritchie killed Deputy Marshal Leonard Arms who was attempting to arrest Ritchie on an old warrant.¹¹⁰ All in all, slave catchers’ freedom to pursue fugitives was particularly grating to those who strongly opposed the Fugitive Slave Law’s enforcement and fought alongside African Americans to increase their mobility.

The situation on the border was further complicated by the fact that passionately pro-slavery communities and free-state towns sprouted up in close proximity to each other. In Platte County, which bordered Kansas along the Missouri River, pro-slavery citizens formed the Platte County Self-Defensive Association in 1854. Although abolitionists lived in the county—even within the rabidly pro-slavery town of Weston—this association did much to intimidate the slave and abolitionist population. In early 1854, they posted a notice in the *Platte Argus* newspaper advertising a public meeting to address abolitionist influences in the area. The notice read as follows: “Whereas several valuable slaves have recently been decoyed by abolitionists, and induced to run away; and whereas it is manifest that we have some negro stealers in our midst, therefore all good citizens are requested to meet at Weston on next Thursday afternoon, July 20th to make the necessary arrangements for the security of our property.”¹¹¹ Each community (whether pro-slavery or free-state) looked out for their own interests.

¹⁰⁹ “Slave Hunting,” *Kansas Herald of Freedom*, November 21, 1857.

¹¹⁰ William O. Wagon, “Wrecking Slavery from the Kansas Territory: The ‘Topeka Boys’ as Saboteurs, 1855-1861,” Unpublished paper presented at the 48th Annual Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha, Nebraska, March 4, 2005.

¹¹¹ Frederick Starr Jr. to Father [Frederick Starr Sr.], September 19, 1854, in Frederick Starr Jr. Papers, WHMC—C.

Even around predominantly abolitionist settlements like Lawrence, the pro-slavery supporters in the surrounding countryside and in Lecompton (which was the pro-slavery territorial capital from 1855 to 1861) were watchful for any activity they deemed suspicious. Jacob and Thomas McGee, who lived a few miles east of Lawrence, had a reputation for spying on abolitionists in the area. They were closely allied with Jake Hurd, who was later described as “the most reckless and daring border ruffian that ever lived in Kansas.”¹¹² This posse regularly assisted slaveholders who came into Kansas looking for their slave property. When John Doy, his son, and another man set out to escort some former slaves northward in 1859, they were intercepted by Hurd’s gang, who imprisoned Doy and his son in the Platte City jail and sent the African American members of the party back into slavery.¹¹³

Another vigilante named Charley Hart—who would later gain fame under the name William Quantrill—painted himself as an abolitionist advocate even as he worked alongside the McGees and Hurd to sabotage free-state initiatives in the border region. Sometime in 1860, Quantrill heard that a group of abolitionists were looking to raid Morgan Walker’s plantation, and he signed on to help. This large farm, situated near Blue Springs in Jackson County, included twenty-six slaves in the household. Quantrill secretly notified Walker and his family, who were able to collect some neighbors to fend off the impending attack. When the abolitionists struck just after dark, they faced an ambush; Edwin Morrison died instantly, but

¹¹² Sidney S. Herd and William E. Connelley, “Quantrill and the U.G.R.R. in Lawrence, Kansas Territory,” in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 14.

¹¹³ John Doy, *Narrative of John Doy* (New York: Thomas Holman, 1860), 25. Doy stated that all the participants in his capture were “Northern men by birth” (Doy, 26).

Charles Ball was injured in the hip and he crept into the timber with his friend, Chalkey Lipsey. An enslaved man in the Walker household chanced upon Ball and Lipseys' hiding place and led Walker and his neighbors to the spot, where they murdered both abolitionists. Later accounts stated that Walker shot Ball through the forehead with his shotgun, and Quantrill put his revolver in Lipsey's mouth and fired.¹¹⁴ The unidentified slave's motivations are unclear, but there are three possible explanations for his behavior. First, perhaps he was unsure of the abolitionists' intentions, since sometimes slave stealers would kidnap slaves and sell them for a profit, a frightening prospect. Second, it is possible that this slave was attempting to curry favor with his owner by allying himself against abolitionists, perhaps as misdirection to gain further autonomy and increased mobility. A third, but less likely option, is that he did not welcome emancipation; fugitives often had to leave loved ones behind in their pursuit of freedom, which sometimes gave these men and women valid reasons for staying at home. Of course, any combination of these three explanations is viable. Aside from this enslaved man's involvement, the brutality of the incident inflamed the already festering passions within free-state communities across the line in Kansas and is a perfect example of how abolitionists and their opponents clashed over slavery. It also illustrates how dedicated pro-slavery

¹¹⁴ John J. Lutz, "Quantrill and the Morgan Walker Tragedy" *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 8 (1904), 326. Of course since this narrative is coming from the free-state perspective, and it was written well after Quantrill's raid on Lawrence in 1863, these descriptions of Quantrill's brutality may be somewhat exaggerated. Albert Southwick, who is quoted in Lutz's article, said Quantrill was "the most cruel, bloodthirsty and despicable guerrilla of his day" (Lutz, 328). The portion of the account dealing with this unidentified slave is not corroborated in other sources, and indeed later in the article Lutz quotes a free-stater who heard Walker's own story about the night's occurrences; according to that account, Walker and his companions found Ball and Lipsey's hiding place by tracking a blood trail, not with the aid of this enslaved man. There is no way to be sure which description is more accurate.

partisans were to quenching all abolitionist action in the border region. Because of this, free state communities had to maintain a nearly continuous state of watchfulness.

Threat of Capture

The most frightening prospect for any fugitive on their journey northward was being captured and returned to slavery. This made it absolutely imperative that station heads find effective (and sometimes ingenious ways) to hide fugitives. Many of these techniques were similar to those used in other Northern states on different “lines” of the railroad. There were a variety of methods for hiding fugitives. In 1859 one of Duff Green’s slaves, who was about to be sold, grabbed her daughter and with the help of another African American made her way to the home of Reverend J. H. Byrd who then took her to a local abolitionist who could keep her for the night. This abolitionist, George Evans, hid her and her daughter on a platform that was balanced on the cross beams of his cabin’s roof. They stayed there for at least two or three days.¹¹⁵ Zeke Downing, who lived near Ottawa, had a well-fortified second level in his house that had portholes; this house was the first house on the road when coming from Missouri, making it a prime location on the railroad route. Sometime in 1857 or 1858 an enslaved man from just a few miles across the border came through the area and hid in this part of the house, called “the fort.” His owner, Isaiah Brown, came to

¹¹⁵ Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel, *Bleeding Borders: Race, Gender, and Violence in Pre-Civil War Kansas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 49-50.

inquire about this runaway, but Downing was able to keep this man safe until that evening when he escorted the fugitive to his next destination.¹¹⁶

At the Abbott home, near Lawrence, one male fugitive had a very close call with a group of slave catchers. Two men had come to the home while James Abbott was away, and although his wife attempted to dissuade them, they searched the grounds with a bloodhound. She sent this young man out into the woods with an axe and instructed him to kill the dog if his hiding place was discovered. A short while later she heard a yelp and then silence. The slave catchers left (without their bloodhound) and the fugitive came back to the house. He had been so scared and shaken that he was trembling when he raised the axe and it took two strokes to kill the dog.¹¹⁷ Although this episode was only recorded by a white participant, it nevertheless illustrates the terror that filled slaves' minds as they lay hiding from those who would bring them back into slavery.

In Shawnee County John Armstrong's stone house, built in 1856, had an immense hogshead in the cellar, which could fit more than one fugitive comfortably. Fugitives would hide in his hogshead until Armstrong thought it was safe enough to row them across the Kansas River to the Holton road.¹¹⁸ Similarly a well-known citizen of Quindaro, Clarina Nichols, hid a woman named Carolina in her cistern,

¹¹⁶ A. Ellis, "Editor, Chautauqua Journal," in *Negroes Clippings*, vols. 1-2, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹¹⁷ Mary Abbott, "Reminiscences of Mrs. J. B. Abbott, De Soto," September 1, 1895, in *Slaves and Slavery Collection*, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹¹⁸ Richard A. Swallow, "Fleeing Slaves Were Hidden in Topeka Building," *Topeka Capital*, April 21, 1929, in *Shawnee County Clippings*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

with a chair, pillow and comforter to keep her warm.¹¹⁹ John Ritchie's home in Topeka was another stop. There was a spring off of Shunganunga Creek located in a thicket just east of the Ritchie house, and during the day the fugitives would hide there and Mrs. Ritchie would bring them food in her water bucket, and then fill her bucket with water to carry back to the house. In 1856 John Ritchie narrowly missed being arrested by a contingent of United States soldiers who came to his house seeking a fugitive who, unbeknownst to them, had just left for Holton.¹²⁰

Near both the Armstrong and Ritchie homes there was another stop on the railroad line. Shortly after moving out to Kansas, a free-state man named Benjamin Van Horn witnessed slaves being hidden at a boarding house in Topeka.¹²¹ One morning while Van Horn and the other guests were eating breakfast, word came that the military was seeking some fugitives known to be in the area, and so everyone jumped up from the table and moved some floorboards to make a small hiding place. While the soldiers searched the house, Van Horn recalled, "we were very busy eating,

¹¹⁹ "Mrs. C.I.H. Nichol's Letter: Recollections," *Wyandotte Gazette*, December 29, 1888, in Kansas Newspaper Collection, Kansas City (Kansas) Public Library (hereafter KCKPL).

¹²⁰ Mrs. H. C. Root, "A Few Incidents in the Life of General John Ritchie," April 27, 1903, in John Ritchie Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. This creek ran underneath what is now Interstate 70 near the 10th Street exit. At the time, apparently, the house stood on the corner of Monroe Street and 12th Street, although today the building's address is 1116 E. Madison.

¹²¹ Benjamin Van Horn to George W. Martin, undated, in Benjamin Van Horn Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The sources are unclear, but it is possible that Van Horn was describing the Scales boarding house. Other reminiscences stated that the Scales and John Armstrong lived in the same house, which was located one block east of the building that Van Horn describes, but since these recollections were recorded well after the fact their memories may have been inaccurate. Of course, another plausible explanation is that there was more than one boarding house in Topeka that served as an Underground Railroad station, and coincidentally those stations were only one block away from each other.

not a man cracked a smile, and we ate an uncommonly hearty breakfast that morning and were a long time at it.”¹²²

George, Fanny, and their children, who had headed northward in the company of Lewis Bodwell and Emerson, were almost exposed while crossing a swollen river on the way to Sabetha (near the Nebraska border). The entire party—including the fugitives—needed to disembark from the covered wagon, but with witnesses on the river bank this must be done discreetly. As Bodwell recorded, “George was advised to slip out at the front of the wagon and team and take to the brush, which he did. Fanny, with sunbonnet tied close, and baby under her shawl, the preacher [Bodwell] said, ‘Come mother, you’ll have to get out,’ which she did in plain sight of the provoking curious crowd. The others followed.”¹²³ This family made it safely to Iowa, much to everyone’s relief.

Still, although many Kansas abolitionists and Missouri slaves considered Nebraska and Iowa to be relatively safe destinations, the lingering presence of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 did mandate that even fugitives who traveled safely to a free state could still be remanded back into slavery. This was particularly the case in predominantly white communities where a growth in the free-black population was a cause for concern. In a letter to Thaddeus Hyatt, John E. Stewart outlined his reservations, stating that “there is something wrong in Nebraska & Iowa I am fearful

¹²² Benjamin Van Horn to George W. Martin, undated, in Benjamin Van Horn Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹²³ Lewis Bodwell, “A Home Missionary Journey Never Before Reported,” *The Kansas Telephone*, August 1893.

that some have been captured there & sent back.¹²⁴ Even in towns that had a reputation for welcoming fugitives, such as Tabor, Iowa, fugitives and their abolitionist allies might encounter resistance. After John Brown took his last party of fugitives into Iowa in the early months of 1859, in what was a long, harrowing escape through Kansas and Nebraska, the citizens of Tabor held several meetings to decry Brown's actions (which had resulted in the death of a Missouri slaveowner, David Cruise). Fortunately, according to George Gill's account of this journey, there were enough sympathetic souls in town to aid the hungry and tired group before they proceeded eastward to Illinois.¹²⁵

Fugitives and Abolitionists Embrace Violence

At times, the dangerous nature of Underground Railroad work and slaveowners' dedication to recapturing fugitives meant that fugitives and their abolitionist allies sometimes used violence as a defensive measure. Based on surviving reminiscences, abolitionists who participated in railroad activities had embraced the more radical aspects of the abolition movement with few reservations. In the attempt to help Charley Fisher escape from his captors in Leavenworth, Fisher's friend Lewis Weld was charged with using force, including a club, knife, pistol, and "other hurtful weapons."¹²⁶ Fugitives who found refuge on John E. Stewart's farm in Douglas County could expect to be armed. For example, in the

¹²⁴ John E. Stewart to Thaddeus Hyatt, December 20, 1859, in Thaddeus Hyatt Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹²⁵ George Gill, "John Brown and the Rescue of Missouri Slaves," in Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 85.

¹²⁶ T. A. McNeal, *When Kansas Was Young* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 8.

summer of 1860 a group of slave catchers was pursuing some fugitives, and in anticipation of their arrival “Stewart had armed the Negroes and he and the Negroes successfully withstood the kidnappers, who got but one slave.”¹²⁷

Napoleon Simpson, who was living with the Gardner family in Douglas County, helped to fend off his kidnappers in that same year. Simpson had made his way northward the year before, but he returned to retrieve his wife who remained a slave in Missouri. She was, however, confined to bed and so Simpson crossed the line back into Kansas and stayed there in the hopes that he could save her in a few weeks’ time. He stayed with the Gardner family, where they “furnished him with a Sharps rifle and instructed him in its management.”¹²⁸ When a pro-slavery posse attacked the home, Simpson fought gallantly. When he was reloading his rifle a member of the posse hit him with buckshot, shattering his shoulder and killing him. According to Theodore Gardner’s later recollection, Simpson “fell upon his pallet, exclaiming, ‘Oh! I am shot.’ Fifteen minutes later, when he was struggling for breath, father went to him and asked if there was anything he could do for him. He said, ‘Fight! Fight hard!’”¹²⁹ It is unclear whether this last line was an embellishment added to the family lore, but this story nevertheless illustrates that fugitives and abolitionists did use violence to prevent escapees’ return to slavery (with mixed success).

Slaveholders throughout the border region dedicated time and effort to maintaining a firm hold on their slave property, controlling slaves through restrictions

¹²⁷ Sidney S. Herd and William E. Connelley, “Quantrill and the U.G.R.R. in Lawrence, Kansas Territory,” in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 17.

¹²⁸ Theodore Gardner, “The Last Battle of the Border War,” in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 62.

¹²⁹ Theodore Gardner, “The Last Battle of the Border War,” in Sheridan, *Freedom’s Crucible*, 62.

such as travel passes, roaming slave patrols, and posses following the trail of fugitive slaves. Because the federal government continued to uphold the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, even in areas where it was unpopular, slaveholders could marshal significant power in their defense. But even within this struggle between slaves and slaveowners over mobility, enslaved African Americans consistently pushed back against these regulations and carved out various opportunities for movement that did not always coincide neatly with slaveholders' personal concerns. Interestingly, however, slaves on the border sometimes enjoyed a remarkable degree of mobility that was sanctioned (or even welcomed) by white heads of the households; this was thanks in part to the existence of a small-scale system quite unlike the institution as it existed in the Deep South. It was not uncommon for a slaveowner to send a trusted slave on an important errand, or to entrust an enslaved individual with money or weapons with no fear that this man or woman might betray that trust. This disconnect—wherein a slaveowner seemingly adopted a blind trust and conviction that one's slave was a trustworthy, contented companion—was a testament to the strength of the slave system on the Kansas-Missouri border. Whites at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy, particularly those who embodied paternalistic attitudes about the mental incompetency and inferior abilities of the slave population, could not fathom why an enslaved individual might disregard their owner's wishes in favor of willful confrontation or escape.

At other times, slaveowners cultivated an increased paranoia that their slave property would no longer be safe as long as political tensions continued to plague the Kansas-Missouri border; in fact, this was not an irrational conclusion, since slaves continued to escape on the Underground Railroad in numbers that demonstrate their

overwhelming desire for freedom. In a variety of contexts, then, masters and slaves were carrying on conversations fraught with subtext and hidden meanings, applying their own definitions of mobility that perfectly illustrate how the Kansas-Missouri border was more than just a geographic site: it was a continually evolving social landscape that exhibited the tensions between clashing definitions of freedom and individual autonomy.

CHAPTER 5

ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND: THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN THE CIVIL WAR YEARS, 1861-1865

During the Great Depression Mary Bell, an eighty-five year old woman living in St. Louis, Missouri, dictated her life's story to an employee of the Federal Writer's Project initiative who was recording the experiences of former slaves. Bell had been born in May 1852, most likely in Chariton County, Missouri, to an enslaved couple who had an abroad marriage.¹ In 1864 her father, Spotswood Rice, mustered into the 67th United States Colored Troops. During his enlistment he attempted to retrieve his children—including Mary—from their owner, a woman named Kitty Diggs who protested vehemently and accused Rice of trying to steal his children. In response to Diggs, Rice wrote in his own hand the following letter: "My children is my own and I expect to get them and when I get ready to come after Mary I will have bout a power and authority to bring her away and to exact vengeance on them that holds my child."² His earnest, frank concern for his children, who suffered as slaves while he was away and unable to secure their liberty, highlights the struggles that African Americans in Missouri and Kansas faced during the tumultuous years of the Civil

¹ Mary Bell, "She Loves Army Men," August 19, 1937, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves*, vol. 10, *Missouri Narratives* (Washington, D.C., 1941), 28-30. Her father was in charge of his owner's tobacco plantation and had become a leader of the local African American community. When emancipation became an immediate possibility, Rice led a party of eleven fellow slaves to Kansas City to enlist in the U. S. army.

² Spotswood Rice to Kitty Diggs, September 3, 1864, in *Free at Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War*, ed. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (New York: The New Press, 1992), 482. The spelling in this letter has been altered for ease of reading, but the word order and syntax remain faithful to the original.

War. For Rice, as for other black residents in the region, this sectional conflict bore special meaning because it altered the balance of power that existed between master and slave. But, just as Spotswood Rice attempted to balance his fatherly duties with his commitment to the Union war effort, so too did slaves on the border find themselves caught in the whirlwind of events that promised them freedom but also, concurrently, brought untold challenges.

This chapter will argue that on the Kansas-Missouri border, a site of turmoil created by fluctuating allegiances and an unstable political environment, unassuming and ordinary people brought about a restructuring of American society. These bondspeople, like their counterparts in other Upper South states, became emancipated on their own terms and established themselves as a visible illustration of the continually evolving definition of liberty and freedom. Well before President Lincoln had come to terms with the concept of emancipation as a war aim, these individuals comprehended and internalized the broader implications of the Civil War. For them, any war against the South would invariably have consequences for the peculiar institution.

For this reason, emancipation was central to African Americans' priorities. As Barbara Jean Fields has argued in her study of Maryland, another Upper South state that remained in the Union, "as soon as federal troops appeared in the vicinity the slaves took the first step, absconding from their owners and seeking refuge with the army."³ The situation on the border was no different, as slaves forced the

³ Barbara Jean Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 100.

military's hands and continued to press on throughout the duration of the conflict. Nineteenth century contemporaries noted as much; Richard Cordley, a minister in Lawrence, Kansas, wrote later that "slaves on the border took advantage of it to make sure of their own freedom, whatever might be the result of the conflict. They did not wait for any proclamation, nor did they ask whether their liberation was a war measure or a civil process."⁴ Enslaved individuals implemented their own goals on their own terms, exerting their newfound independence by escaping to behind Union lines (as "contrabands"), settling independently in Kansas, or enlisting in the U.S. military.⁵ In doing so, they challenged established notions of blacks' fitness for life in free society, including dispelling stereotypes about African Americans' ability to carry out their duties within the military.⁶

This was possible in large part because in Missouri, the only slaveholding border state to be surrounded by free states on three sides, the war brought unparalleled chaos. As historian Mark Geiger concluded, "Missouri ranked third among the states in the amount of military activity within its borders.... In Missouri

⁴ Richard Cordley, "The Contrabands from the History of Lawrence," undated, in Douglas County Historical Society Manuscripts, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter SRL).

⁵ The term "contraband" originated from Union General Benjamin Butler, commander of the Department of Eastern Virginia, who developed the concept that slaves could be legally confiscated from Confederates as "contraband of war." After military officials elsewhere began adopting this policy, enslaved individuals who emancipated themselves by attaching to a military camp were known as "contrabands." The development of a formal contraband policy will be addressed later in this chapter.

⁶ Racism did cut through the heart of this region, particularly among the formerly slaveholding class. Many Kansans and Missourians during the Civil War were strongly opposed to African American emigration. Even glowing endorsements of blacks' diligence and dedication as fighters and as laborers were often coupled with denigrating comments about how these traits were the exception that proved the rule. The presence of racism and paternalism should not, however, overshadow the very real advances in bringing African Americans into the greater free community. For a discussion of this inherent racism in the United States more broadly, and its implications for emancipation, consult Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 56.

most of the confrontations were clashes between Union militia and free-floating bands of armed men, only loosely allied with regular Confederate forces.”⁷ This confusion, coupled with intense guerrilla warfare, provided an outlet for enslaved men and women to control their mobility and make exodus a tangible reality. Between the movements of the organized military (including the Missouri State Militia and Sterling Price’s army), the unauthorized actions of bushwackers, and jayhawking raids into the state, Missouri slaves found ample opportunity to escape. Although some fugitives received help from sympathetic whites, most of these escaped slaves liberated themselves, taking advantage of sudden opportunities to control their own mobility.⁸

Chaos Reigns Supreme

For both black and white residents along the border, in some respects the Civil War was merely an escalation of the violence that had been brewing along the Kansas-Missouri line since the territorial period. Kansas had entered the Union as a free state on January 29, 1861, only ten weeks before the attack on Ft. Sumter. Residents of the state enthusiastically supported Lincoln during the secession crisis and the ensuing war. As long as slavery existed in Missouri, slaves continued to flock across the border on the Underground Railroad, establishing themselves within

⁷ Mark W. Geiger, “Indebtedness and the Origins of Guerrilla Violence in Civil War Missouri,” *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 1 (February 2009), 61.

⁸ For example, African Americans who joined the military were able to travel outside their home communities and away from the restrictions of the slaveholder. Also, even though their movements in the military were proscribed by the military’s demands (to follow orders, etc.), these men understood that while increased opportunities to navigate the landscape might be hindered by their enlistment, in the long run they would have greater control if the war brought an end to slavery.

Kansas communities like Topeka, Lawrence, and Quindaro. All in all, Kansans embraced their reputation as the freest of the free states, even if many Kansas whites still harbored noticeable racial prejudices against African Americans.

In contrast, Missouri's white population was brutally divided between dedicated Unionists (some of whom were slaveholders) and pro-Southern citizens eager to support the Confederacy. Key members of the state government, including governor Claiborne Jackson, made clear that their allegiances did not lie with Lincoln, even after a Missouri state convention voted to remain in the Union.⁹ Jackson, General Sterling Price, and other pro-Confederate officials fled the capital of Jefferson City on June 14, 1861, remaining in exile for the next four years. The Missouri Constitutional Convention convened that summer to appoint a pro-Union provisional government, which would remain in power for the duration of the conflict. Thanks to these conflicting allegiances, as well as the state's distance from centralized federal control, the violence in Missouri nearly rivaled that of Southern states such as Tennessee, although in Missouri that violence came from guerrilla fighters as well as members of the regular army.¹⁰ This civil strife would profoundly impact the outcome of the War. As James McPherson has argued, the challenges of

⁹ James F. Simon, *Lincoln and Chief Justice Taney: Slavery, Secession, and the President's War Powers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 183.

¹⁰ Geiger, 61. As A. L. Gilstrap noted in a letter to General William Rosecrans, in addition to fighting a war against the Confederacy in the South and a political battle against the Copperhead peace movement in the North, the Union faced an internal rebellion that existed "in nearly all the slave States of the Union, and has assumed the dignity of a belligerent power" (A.L. Gilstrap to William Rosecrans, February 27, 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, compiled by the United States War Department, War Records Office, Series I, Volume 34, Part II [Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1891], 440. This multi-volume work is hereafter cited as "*War of the Rebellion*").

administering regions where the citizens had divided loyalties, like Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky, could harm the Union effort significantly.¹¹

One of President Lincoln's greatest concerns during the opening months of the war was how to keep the border states within the Union, and correspondence by Union officials reflect their identical concerns for how to maintain control over Missouri specifically. John Brown Jr., the eldest son of John Brown and a radical abolitionist himself, remarked that the Missouri public's allegiance to the Union was transitory at best; he wrote that some Union supporters would "take the oath of allegiance in the forenoon and in the afternoon shoot you from behind a thicket of brush."¹² Other Jayhawkers and Union officers also lamented the state of affairs in Missouri. John C. Frémont, commander of the Western Department in 1861, fully understood the instability that reigned supreme in Missouri, particularly "its disorganized condition, the helplessness of the civil authority, the total insecurity of life, and the devastation of property by bands of murderers and marauders."¹³ As a result of the dire situation in the state, he declared martial law on August 31, 1861, and included a clause that specifically freed any slaves whose owner "shall take up arms against the United States, or who shall be directly proven to have taken active part with their enemies in the field."¹⁴ Some accounts of guerrilla activity were perhaps exaggerated out of fear, or out of a belief that such horror stories would serve to bolster the Union cause. Regardless, Missouri's status as both a slave state and a

¹¹ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 306-307.

¹² John Brown Jr. to Parker Pillsbury, July 18, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter KSHS).

¹³ "Important from Missouri," *New York Times*, September 1, 1861.

¹⁴ "Important from Missouri," *New York Times*, September 1, 1861.

Union state led to chaos on the border that was unlike the situation in border states like Delaware, which had overwhelmingly sided with the Union.¹⁵

As enslaved men and women latched onto the opportunities that arose amidst this disorder, and slave escapes increased, more and more slaveholders on the state line sought to protect their property in the midst of political and social instability that they feared might continue for some time. Larry Lapsley, a slave from Jackson County, Missouri, recalled in his reminiscence that his owner, Samuel Lapsley, took all of his slaves to Texas during the first year of the war. While in Texas, Larry Lapsley was hired out to various neighbors before a harrowing escape through Indian country that finally led him to Fort Gibson, which was under the control of Union forces. At Fort Gibson, a Kansan named Luke Parsons hired Lapsley and took him north to Salina, Kansas.¹⁶

This civil insurrection could, then, lead to stricter oversight of slaves in the hopes that slaveowners could keep their property safe, but it is also likely that this chaos could benefit slaves seeking to escape. Many Missourians lived in near constant fear of marauding Jayhawkers. With a distracted master or mistress, and the potential of assistance in the form of Jayhawkers or the U. S. military, some slaves capitalized on their owner's preoccupied state. One slave on the farm of Jacob Hall, in Jackson County, Missouri, took advantage of his owner's absence to negotiate with Jacob's wife, Mary, who had been left alone to tend the farm. According to a letter that Mary wrote in 1863, this slave named George had received an offer of thirty

¹⁵ Historian James McPherson considers Delaware a "free state," even though slavery existed within its boundaries, because 90 percent of its black population was legally free. See McPherson, 297.

¹⁶ Larry Lapsley, "History of Larry Lapsley," undated, in Cecil Howe Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

dollars per month to work at Pike's Peak, presumably in the gold fields. George had informed Mary that "he would go unless I paid him \$15 per month. I thought I would have to do it, as I could not get a long without some one.... He has changed very much, I do not like [him] half as well as I used to, he is spoiled, were you here he would do much better."¹⁷ George understood that the mistress of the house was under unusual stress and was in desperate need of labor, and although the results of this negotiation are unknown to us today, it is significant that he took advantage of this situation. As Barbara Jean Fields concluded, when the secessionists' attempts in Maryland failed, slaveowners were in the awkward position of defending their property rights while publicly proclaiming their loyalty to the Union. From that point on, "the slaves quietly occupied high ground. From the outset they were engaged in a war with only one object: to secure their freedom."¹⁸ Maryland, like its fellow border state of Missouri, remained a Union state where the citizens' loyalties were nonetheless divided.

Yet, the two-faced nature of life on the border—where many Missourians were "Union by day and Confederate by night"—could also thwart escape attempts. For slaves who lived within a few miles of the Kansas-Missouri line, escape could be swift. But for those slaves living further into the Missouri interior, locating a safe place to hide during the day proved even more difficult than it had in the pre-war years. How could one know whether a neighbor was truly anti-slavery, or whether those anti-slavery professions were just an act playing out for the benefit of Union

¹⁷ Mary Hall to Jacob Hall, May 6, 1863, in Jacob Hall Family Papers, Jackson County (Mo.) Historical Society and Archives, Independence (hereafter JCHS).

¹⁸ Fields, 100.

soldiers? Who could be trusted when allegiances shifted nearly as fast as the brisk western wind?

An interesting anecdote from a Jackson County woman attests to this. Nellie Barrett, who had three brothers-in-law serving in the Confederate army, remained at home during the war with her children and wounded husband (a former Confederate soldier). In a reminiscence, she described the terror she felt when Union soldiers invaded the home of her in-laws, located within sight of her own log cabin. A Union corporal questioned Barrett's mother-in-law about her family's allegiance, and she swore that none of her sons were presently engaged in fighting. The corporal responded by saying, "'Madam, this Negro woman,' the corporal indicated Nan, the elder Barrett's Negro house slave, 'said you were rebels, therefore you lie!'"¹⁹ Nan, the accusing slave, pleaded with her mistress and said "'I never said that, honey, you know I never!'"²⁰ Although it is difficult to determine Nan's motivations from a pro-Southern reminiscence, it is certainly possible that she did indeed provide the Union soldiers with information, but when her mistress and her mistress's family learned of her betrayal, Nan felt it wisest to plead ignorance. This story powerfully illustrates the shaky middle ground that slaves navigated. In Nan's case a supposed ally—a Union soldier—was more concerned with locating a Confederate combatant than in ensuring Nan's safety.

While mistrust of the Union military may prove an essential means of survival, not all Union troops were created equal. Jayhawkers, part of James Lane's

¹⁹ S. M. Barrett, "A Brave Mother's Story of Terror in War Days on Missouri Border," *Kansas City Times*, January 21, 1941, in Kansas History Clippings, vol. 10, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

²⁰ S. M. Barrett, "A Brave Mother's Story of Terror in War Days on Missouri Border," *Kansas City Times*, January 21, 1941, in Kansas History Clippings, vol. 10, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Kansas Brigade, canvassed the border region and gained a reputation for supporting black emancipation. Even before the U.S. government established procedures for dealing with black refugees, Jayhawkers and pro-emancipation Union units took it upon themselves to aid slaves' escape; as John Brown Jr. put it, "more than two thousand slaves were by us restored to the possession of themselves, were 'Jayhawked' into freedom."²¹ His former company, part of the 7th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, "proceeded to deprive the rebels of every means by which they had successfully carried on the war against the United States"—including slave labor.²² According to the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, a paper relatively sympathetic to the emancipationist cause, Captain Cleveland's unit, also part of the 7th Kansas, targeted a Mr. Gilles, a Confederate sympathizer who lived in the vicinity of Westport, Missouri. They captured fourteen of his slaves and helping themselves to horses, wagons, and other goods. In order to aid these slaves, Cleveland stopped by a local hotel and stole thirty-two dollars to help pay for their transportation.²³

In addition to encounters with Jayhawking units, slaves on the border had some contact with pro-secession forces, including organized military companies as well as irregulars. Confederate guerrillas were active in their dedication to protecting

²¹ John Brown Jr. to Parker Pillsbury, July 18, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

²² John Brown Jr. to Parker Pillsbury, July 18, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. As of July 1862 he was on leave from the military due to a severe case of sciatica.

²³ "Contrabands," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, September 19, 1861. This sort of behavior on the part of Jayhawkers did not stir up popular enthusiasm in Kansas, although there is evidence that Kansans supported the Jayhawkers more generally. The *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* ran an article by Web Wilder in 1861 that typifies these mixed reactions to Jayhawking. Early into the article, the unidentified author wrote that "the essence of Jayhawking is Democracy. It means that villains who avoid the Law by specious pleas are to be punished.... We have had some Jayhawking of late in Leavenworth. It worked well and every loyal man thanks God it was done" (Web Wilder, "All About Jayhawking," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, September 20, 1861).

slaveholders' property; their zeal often encouraged them to harass and mistreat the slaves they encountered in their exploits. Union general Thomas Ewing noted that "the guerrillas have shown a singular and inhuman ferocity towards them [the slaves]." When a group of several hundred slaves had attempted to follow two companies of the 4th Missouri, the commanding officer warned them that traveling with the army would attract the attention of guerrilla forces. Most turned away after this warning, but the next day a group of bushwackers attacked the refugees and killed all but one.²⁴ One slave in Platte County, Missouri, named Armilda Williams, later recalled one of her more vivid memories of the Civil War, which was how the bushwackers terrorized slaves. She stated that "they told the slaves that the Yankees had horns.... They told us the woods were full of men so we would be afraid to run away."²⁵ Their threats did not dissuade her father from creeping across the border and eventually bringing his family to join him in Kansas.

Peter Lee, a young adult during the war years, had a similarly frightful encounter. Lee worked at a still house and mill near Weston that was owned by his master, Martin Spencer. One day, while he was working at the mill, some of William Quantrill's raiders offered to provide him with passage to Kansas. Lee declined, stating that "he was satisfied with his present situation, got along well with his master, and could see no necessity for leaving him."²⁶ Quantrill replied by saying

²⁴ Thomas Ewing Jr. to C. W. Marsh, August 3, 1863, in Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, Series II, *The Black Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 229.

²⁵ Harold Coats, "Topeka Woman Recalls Her Early Life Spent as a Slave in Missouri," *Topeka Capital*, May 6, 1941, in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

²⁶ "An Interesting Negro Character," *The Atchison Daily Globe*, July 12, 1907, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

that Lee was “a ‘good smart nigger,’ and that it was good for him that he refused to go, for they intended to put a bullet in his head when they got him to the [Missouri] river.”²⁷

At other times, the guerrillas’ desire to strike out at Union sympathizers included kidnapping slaves or free blacks on either side of the line. In 1863 two men came through Atchison and stated that they were part of Jennison’s jayhawker regiment, although they refused to give their names. Late one night, they ran into Joseph Gilbert’s house and grabbed an African American man who was working on Gilbert’s farm. According to the *Atchison Freedom’s Champion*, “it is highly probable...that some of the neighbors, who are known to be pro-slavery, secesh sympathizers, had given information concerning the whereabouts of the negro, and in this way aided in his capture.”²⁸ During Quantrill’s raid on Lawrence in 1863, George Ellis was working on his family’s farm outside the town when some Union scouts in the area saw a cloud of dust rising up from the south. The raiders killed the scouts and George’s father, but George, his brother Ben, and his mother Jane managed to survive; George had hid in the thicket near the Kansas River, and as the raiders burned the house Jane managed to drag Ben out of the flames by concealing him underneath a feather bed.²⁹ Quantrill’s raid, which resulted in the deaths of 193 men and boys, was the most gruesome act of violence against civilians during the

²⁷ “An Interesting Negro Character,” *The Atchison Daily Globe*, July 12, 1907, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. It is unclear whether this was indeed Quantrill’s gang, since this story is undated. Regardless, Lee’s experience documents why slaves were cautious and untrusting of guerrillas.

²⁸ “Another Negro Kidnapped,” *Freedom’s Champion*, April 4, 1863.

²⁹ George Allen Root, “George Ellis Reminiscence,” c. 1943, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

entire Civil War. Quantrill—like Bloody Bill Anderson and other notorious guerrillas—left a path of destruction in his wake.

Occasionally, and for a variety of reasons, slaveowners helped their slaves relocate to Kansas. B. W. Lewis of Glasgow, Missouri, wrote to the governor of Kansas in August 1863, lamenting that almost every night there were at least a handful of slaves who fled from their owners.³⁰ “In view of these facts,” Lewis wrote, “we propose on or about the 1st day of November next to set all our negroes free, who may desire it, and put them on a boat, and pay their way to some point in your state. From present indications most of them will go to your state at any rate before the close of the year.”³¹ In this case the chaos of civil war, by Lewis’s estimation, made voluntary emancipation a less troublesome and less stressful option for the slaveowner.

Stepping Toward Emancipation

Despite such contact with Union troops and Confederate guerrillas, many slaves in Missouri were willing to hazard such risks in the hopes of becoming free and escaping into Kansas. Some were close enough to Kansas that they were able to cross the line over to freedom with no assistance from the military. Cities situated on the river—such as Leavenworth, Quindaro, and Wyandotte—attracted the greatest numbers. According to a white resident of Wyandotte, “it was a sight to make one weep, those poor, frightened, half-starved negroes, coming over on the ferry, and the

³⁰ B. W. Lewis to Thomas Carney, August 24, 1863, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

³¹ B. W. Lewis to Thomas Carney, August 24, 1863, in Slaves and Slavery Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

people of the village down at the levee to receive them.”³² No doubt many of these men, women, and children came from other regions of Missouri and nearby states such as Arkansas, Tennessee, and northern Mississippi. Historian Earl Nelson examined auditor’s reports from Missouri, which record taxes, and concluded that in the first four years of the war some Missouri counties lost as much as one quarter to one half of their slave populations. Of course, some of these slaves joined the army or fled into other free states like Iowa and Illinois, but by his calculation Platte County, situated directly on the Kansas-Missouri line, lost twenty-three percent of its slave population, and likely the majority of those refugees had made their way into Kansas.³³

Lawrence, long known for its anti-slavery roots, also became a central site for the growing African American community in Kansas. A Lawrence minister named Richard Cordley stated as much, writing that Lawrence was “the center of hope to the slaves across the border. The colored people of Missouri looked to it as a sort of ‘City of Refuge’ Lawrence was on the direct line to the North pole, even if it did lie to the West.”³⁴ In fact, there were so many refugees entering Douglas County early in the war that the residents became overwhelmed. Another Lawrence resident, John B. Wood, wrote that “131 came into Lawrence in ten days, yesterday 27 had

³² Perl W. Morgan, “Reminiscent of Wyandotte,” *Kansas City Star*, August 18, 1905, in Wyandotte County Clippings, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

³³ Earl J. Nelson, “Missouri Slavery, 1861-1865,” *Missouri Historical Review* 28, no. 4 (July 1934), 268-269. Nelson did not examine every county in the state, but of the 34 counties he listed on this chart there were 16 counties that lost less than 10 percent of the enslaved population, 14 counties that lost between 10 percent and 25 percent, and 4 counties that lost between 26 percent and 55 percent. He did not include a final percentage for Pike County in his chart, but he noted in the text that it lost less than 1 percent of its slave population.

³⁴ Richard Cordley, “The Contrabands from the History of Lawrence,” undated, in Douglas County Historical Society Manuscripts, Kansas Collection, SRL.

arrived by 4 P.M.... There is not an intelligent slave in Mo. but knows where Lawrence is; and we shall have them here by the thousands.”³⁵ Both Wood and Cordley understood that these men and women were taking their emancipation into their own hands with little help from white abolitionists or the military.

Armilda Williams’ father, identified in her reminiscence only as “Pap” Benning, escaped to the Leavenworth area in 1863. “Pap” Williams, his wife, and his children were owned by Jenny Brasfield of Platte County, Missouri. Her father escaped by crossing the Missouri River. According to Armilda’s later retelling of the story, while her father was in Kansas he met “a white man from Platte County who befriended him. Eventually the white man, with ‘a company of soldiers,’ went to Missouri, got Armilda, her mother, and her brothers and sisters and brought them to Kansas.”³⁶ The family settled on a farm situated between Auburn and Dover in Shawnee County, Kansas.

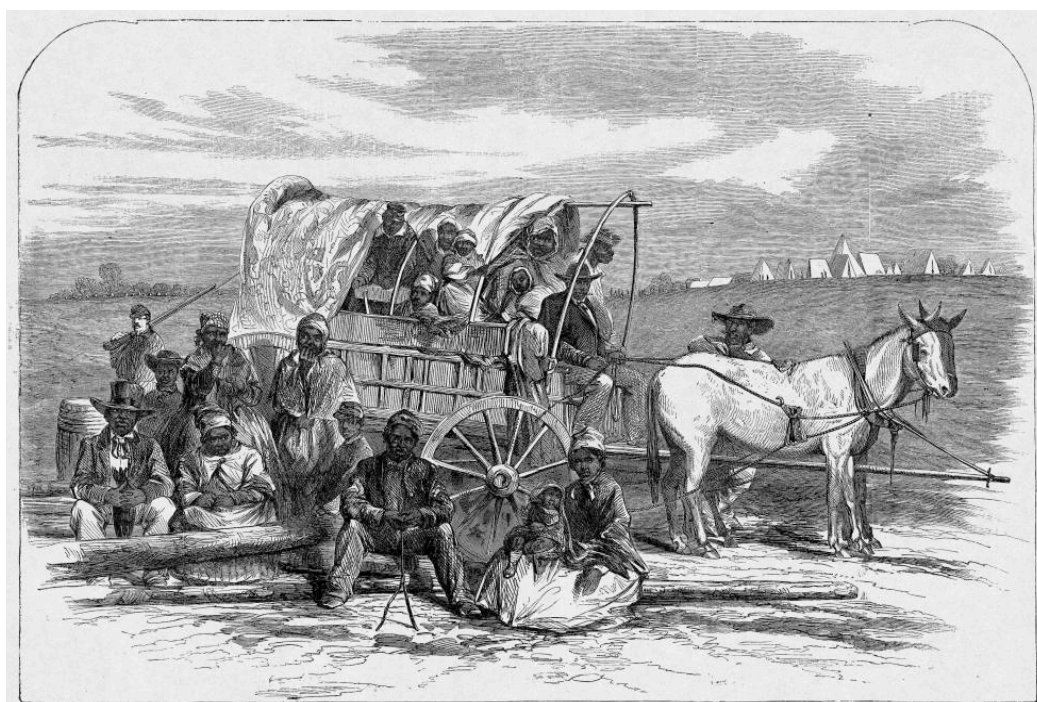
Robert Richardson, a slave of Achilles Perrin of Platte County, was allowed to move to Kansas prior to emancipation (sometime after 1861). Richardson had also settled in Leavenworth, and he returned across the river to retrieve his wife Sarah Ann, and his young son Jefferson. In Sarah Ann’s reminiscence from 1909, she said that her husband “secured a horse from a friend, and, placing Mrs. Richardson and her son, Jeff, on the animal’s back, struck out in the dead hours of the night on their

³⁵ John B. Wood to George L. Stearns, November 19, 1861, in George Luther Stearns Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. In the letter’s postscript Wood noted that “since writing the above I learn that 86 came into town in one drove last evening.”

³⁶ Harold Coats, “Topeka Woman Recalls Her Early Life Spent as a Slave in Missouri,” *Topeka Capital*, May 6, 1941, in Negroes Clippings, vol. 7, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

journey of escape.”³⁷ The ferryman near Leavenworth refused to transport Sarah Ann and Jefferson across the Missouri, so Robert was forced to leave them behind while he crossed the river alone and located a canoe to transport his family to safety. They escaped successfully and began a new life in Leavenworth before settling in the Port William black settlement near Atchison.³⁸

Figure 12: Contrabands Coming Into Camp



Engraving from *Harper's Weekly*, January 31, 1863, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Slaves also emancipated themselves by flocking to the Union lines in unprecedented numbers beginning early in 1861. The 13th Kansas Volunteers had sixty or seventy contrabands who entered their army camp located on the Big Blue

³⁷ “The Mother of Port William,” *The Atchison Daily Globe*, April 23, 1909, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

³⁸ “The Mother of Port William,” *The Atchison Daily Globe*, April 23, 1909, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

River in 1862.³⁹ George Ellis and his family, originally from Jackson County, Missouri, escaped to behind the lines of the 11th Kansas, stationed near Olathe right alongside the Kansas-Missouri border. George, his brother Ben, and his parents settled down and built a log house outside Lawrence on a farm they leased from abolitionist James Lane.⁴⁰

Kansas troops fighting in other states also found their camps inundated with black refugees.⁴¹ Many of these former slaves were temporarily employed by the U. S. army as cooks, teamsters, or laundresses. Joseph Trego, an officer in Lane's Brigade, wrote home to his wife from Montevallo, Missouri, stating that "we send off niggers by the hundreds. Two hundred left for Kansas under the care of Capt. Baine the day we left Osceola [Missouri]."⁴² Two weeks later he penned another letter, this time noting that "we had 250 slaves ready to follow us out of Springfield.... Kansas is about full of niggers now. All our servants are niggers."⁴³ In 1863 Rebecca Brooks Harvey fled to James Blunt's command as they traveled through the Arkansas countryside, eventually moving to Lawrence with her children.⁴⁴ While there, she was reunited with her husband David, who had camped alongside the Union army as

³⁹ Thomas H. Kennedy to T. J. Weed, December 4, 1862, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. 22, Pt. I (1888), 841.

⁴⁰ George Allen Root, "George Ellis Reminiscence," c. 1943, in George Allen Root Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴¹ In this chapter the terms "contraband" and "refugee" will be used in reference to any slaves who had not been emancipated through legal channels and who were seeking refuge with Union forces or had fled to safety in Kansas. The term "former slave" will refer to any person who was formerly enslaved, regardless of how (or if) they became legally free during the war. Consequently there are sections where all three of these terms have overlapping definitions.

⁴² Edgar Langsdorf, ed., "The Letters of Joseph H. Trego, 1857-1864, Linn County Pioneer: Part Two," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (August 1951), 297.

⁴³ Langsdorf, "The Letters of Joseph H. Trego: Part Two," 299.

⁴⁴ Edward S. Harvey, "Rebecca Brooks Harvey," 1946, in Edward S. Harvey Papers, Kansas Collection, SRL. For additional discussion of the burgeoning black community in Lawrence, see Katie H. Armitage, "'Seeking a Home Where He Himself is Free': African Americans Build a Community in Douglas County, Kansas," *Kansas History* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), 155.

they made their way to Leavenworth.⁴⁵ Chaplain Horace Ladd Moore of the 2nd Kansas Cavalry noted that “all were anxious to go to Lawrence, as if that place were a paradise for negroes.”⁴⁶ In 1865 when Kansas conducted the first decennial census, Douglas County (including its county seat of Lawrence) had more than 2,000 African-American inhabitants.⁴⁷

Throughout the western theater, military chaplains took an active role in shepherding contrabands to safety. For units stationed relatively near the Kansas-Missouri border, Kansas became the ultimate destination. In 1861 Chaplain Hugh Dunn Fisher of the 5th Kansas Cavalry, himself a resident of Lawrence, escorted contrabands from Missouri to a new life along the Kansas River in Douglas County.⁴⁸ Shortly before he mustered out of the service in 1863 Fisher took another group, this time composed of 110 fugitives from Helena, Arkansas, to join the growing black community in Leavenworth.⁴⁹ In his role as Assistant Superintendent of Contrabands he made at least three additional trips, including one to Fort Scott.

Chaplain Fisher, along with Chaplain Moore and Chaplain Fish, had the distinction of taking the first group of contrabands into Kansas. They formed their company in Lamar, Missouri, including a train that was close to a mile long. Their destination was Fort Scott, and in their journey the company would have to travel

⁴⁵ Ruth E. Love, “Ed Harvey’s Parents, Born in Slavery, Sent Sons Thru K.U.,” *Lawrence Journal World*, October 13, 1953, in Harvey Family Papers, Kansas Collection, SRL.

⁴⁶ Horace Ladd Moore, “A Kansas Chaplain on the War,” February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁴⁷ Katie H. Armitage, “‘Seeking a Home Where He Himself is Free’: African Americans Build a Community in Douglas County, Kansas” *Kansas History* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), 156. This statistic included individuals who appeared on the census as “black” or “mulatto.”

⁴⁸ Armitage, 156.

⁴⁹ Special Order No. 168, June 22, 1863, in Hugh Dunn Fisher Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

through forty miles of territory controlled by bushwhackers and Confederate regulars. According to Moore's account, "Col. Nugent was forwarding to Fort Scott a small wagonload of condemned muskets, and that the maddened lookers-on might not be tempted too strongly to pursue us, an order was issued that all the men should be armed before we advanced."⁵⁰ Even though the muskets would not fire, the ruse worked and the company made it safely to Kansas. The contrabands' reaction to entering the state was inspiring; Moore wrote that "when these pilgrims to a land of liberty were informed that they were in Kansas, that they were now treading on soil of freedom, their shouts and hurrahs rung out all along the line, in a way that one may not expect to hear twice in a lifetime."⁵¹

Formulating a Contraband Policy

This mass migration did more than change the racial demographic in Kansas; it had nationwide implications as well. Contrabands' presence forced the United States to acknowledge the issue of slavery and develop a coherent policy on the relationship between the U. S. military and escaping slaves. In May 1861, Union General Benjamin Butler, commander of the Department of Eastern Virginia, argued that Confederate slaveholders no longer enjoyed the property rights granted by the U.S. Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850; thus, any slaves who entered his lines would consequently be designated contraband of war and would not be

⁵⁰ Horace Ladd Moore, "A Kansas Chaplain on the War," February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵¹ Horace Ladd Moore, "A Kansas Chaplain on the War," February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

released to white ownership.⁵² Military commanders of Kansas regiments were particularly concerned about how to deal with the influx of contraband slaves. In a letter written from St. Louis in 1863, General Samuel Curtis wrote that “I have more of these [contrabands], unfortunately, than I know what to do with.”⁵³ Military officials noted that contraband camps popped up virtually overnight. Chaplain Moore marveled that in western Missouri “scarcely a day or a night passed that did not witness the arrival of colored refugees in camp.... Sometimes whole families, at other times parts of many families, would come together, making an addition of from ten to sixty to our camp in a night.”⁵⁴ Clearly Missouri slaves seized the opportunity for escape, and most took the initiative without any prompting from Union forces. The Kansas Brigade, of which Moore was a part, had to escort contrabands to Kansas as a way to alleviate the pressure on Union forces of providing food and protection for the refugees.⁵⁵

Not only were Kansas units overwhelmed with escaped slaves from Missouri, but Kansas troops in Arkansas and other reaches of the South had attracted contrabands as well. There were also concerns about how to assist these slaves who

⁵² Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 3-5. As Kate Masur asserts, the term “contraband” was “a placeholder whose appeal would fade once it became clear that the war would secure permanent emancipation. Because ‘contraband’ had long been used to describe property, the term also implied the transitional status of the people to whom it referred. They were neither property with a clear owner (as in slavery) nor free people, but something in between” (Kate Masur, “‘A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation’: The Word ‘Contraband’ and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States,” *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 [March 2007], 1051).

⁵³ Samuel R. Curtis to B. M. Prentiss, March 9, 1863, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. 22, Pt. II (1888), 147.

⁵⁴ Horace Ladd Moore, “A Kansas Chaplain on the War,” February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Box 2, Folder 15, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁵⁵ Horace Ladd Moore, “A Kansas Chaplain on the War,” February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Box 2, Folder 15, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

were entering Missouri, since the state was suffering from intense guerrilla warfare. General Curtis held such concern. “The State of Missouri must not be made the depot for the paupers of Arkansas,” he argued, “and it is not a safe way of disposing of free negroes, because the laws of this State are such as to endanger the freedom of persons of African descent.”⁵⁶ It is unclear whether Curtis was referring to recently freed slaves, or to fully emancipated slaves who were also taking the opportunity to come north. With the intense civil strife continuing in Missouri, African Americans did encounter abuse and intimidation from various parties (secessionists, slaveholders, and guerrillas), making these military officers’ concerns realistic.

The vast numbers of slaves attempting to escape slavery made the contraband issue a major topic of debate in all parts of the South, but Missouri, as a slaveholding state that remained in the Union, occupied a unique position: the state was not officially in rebellion, but in reality the loyalties of Missourians were ruthlessly divided between the United States and the newly-formed Confederacy. Frémont’s 1861 proclamation that slaves of disloyal citizens would be freed made a direct connection between Missouri’s unstable political climate and the need to strip away Confederate sympathizers’ property—including slaves. It was also wildly unpopular in Missouri. As commander of the Western Department his words indeed held weight, but the issue of slavery and its relationship to the Civil War proved to be increasingly difficult to pin down. When it came to states clearly in rebellion (i.e. those who had seceded and joined the Confederacy), Frémont’s approach was

⁵⁶ Samuel R. Curtis to B. M. Prentiss, March 9, 1863, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. 22, Pt. II (1888), 147.

unquestionably clear cut. Yet Missouri had not seceded even if its pro-secession shadow state government still claimed authority. If leading officials and military commanders could not agree on the status of Missouri, there would be no agreement on how to implement a coherent policy regarding escaped slaves. How, then, should the government treat contrabands within the state's boundaries? In the early months of the conflict, this question did not have a clear answer, as evidenced by the ample correspondence that attempted to answer precisely that question.

Secretary of War Simon Cameron acknowledged the complexity of the issue in an 1861 letter to General Benjamin Butler. He believed that the sensible course of action would be to accept slaves of loyal masters "into the service of the United States" in the same way as those of disloyal slaveowners, although loyal masters would be compensated for their slaves' labor. However, a few sentences later he explained that commanding officers could not permit their men to interfere "with the servants of peaceful citizens in house or field, nor will you in any way encourage such servants to leave the lawful service of their masters."⁵⁷ Perhaps the discrepancy lies between his growing personal distaste for slavery and his obligations as Secretary of War. In any case, his letter illustrates that by the fall of 1861 the government had begun to establish a protocol for dealing with contrabands. Of course, former slaves' focused pursuit of emancipation prompted military commanders' attempts to resolve sticky questions about emancipation and slaves' status, compelling these white officers to alter the reigning definitions of liberty.

⁵⁷ "Simon Cameron to B. F. Butler, August 8, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 762.

The situation was further complicated by the presence of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which declared that fugitive slaves in Northern states must be returned to their slaveowners, and that anyone caught assisting a fugitive to safety would be punished. The law had been passed as a concession to Southerners who otherwise would have voted against the Compromise of 1850. While most Southern states had seceded by 1861, the law was technically still on the books and could therefore apply to those slaveholding states that remained in the Union. In response to this dilemma, the House of Representatives adopted a resolution on December 20, 1861, which stated that the fugitive slave law would only allow for the recapture of a slave when his or her owner had proven that they were loyal to the U. S. government.⁵⁸ Apparently some military commanders disregarded this fact, since Attorney General Edward Bates had to remind the U. S. Marshal in Kansas of this fact in July of 1861.⁵⁹

After Frémont was relieved of command on November 2, 1861, the remaining military commanders who were acquainted with the situation on the border in turn adopted—and attempted to enforce—a two-fold policy. First, all decisions about the status of slavery must be determined through legal channels, not at the whim of individuals army officers with their own personal agendas. Second, military personnel had the legal responsibility to return slaves to their appropriate owner if

⁵⁸ House of Representatives Resolution, December 20, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 790. The text reads, “Resolved, That the Judiciary Committee be instructed to report a bill so amending the fugitive slave law enacted in 1850 as to forbid the recapture or return of any fugitive from labor without satisfactory proof first made that the claimant of such fugitive is loyal to the Government.”

⁵⁹ Edward Bates to J. L. McDowell, July 23, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 761.

that slaveowner inquired about their human property. The burden of proof for this was on the slaveowner, who “must establish the rights of property to the negroes as best they may.”⁶⁰ Henry Halleck, who took command of the Department of Missouri in November 1861 as Frémont’s successor, attempted to clarify the matter by issuing General Order No. 3, which stated that fugitive slaves should not be welcomed behind Union lines.⁶¹ All stolen property, including contraband property and fugitive slaves, should be returned to the Missouri populace. The stipulations of Order No. 3 did not, according to General Halleck, apply to “the authorized servants of officers nor to negroes employed by proper authority in camps: it applies only to fugitive slaves.”⁶² Thus the military could “be freed from these vexatious questions.”⁶³ If there was one point where all leading officials could agree, it was this: soldiers’ primary duty was to wage war, not to assist slaveholders in hunting down escapees. Maintaining this attitude would protect the military from accusations of slave stealing and would also allow army personnel to focus on their primary goal—maintaining control of Missouri.

⁶⁰ H. W. Halleck to General Asboth, December 26, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 796.

⁶¹ The Western Division was renamed the Department of Missouri at that same time. According to James McPherson, Halleck was an organized and efficient administrator, but he was “not a fighting soldier” (James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 395); Mark Grimsely, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49. From the very beginning Halleck had disagreed with Butler’s approach toward fugitives; see John F. Marszalek, *Commander of All Lincoln’s Armies: A Life of General Henry W. Halleck* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 111.

⁶² H. W. Halleck to General Asboth, December 26, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 796.

⁶³ H. W. Halleck to Colonel Carlin, January 9, 1862, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 799.

Yet, answers that seemed clear in the abstract were more muddled on the front lines. When the general population seemingly shifted their allegiance on a whim, how might a military officer distinguish a legitimate black worker from a fugitive, or a loyal slaveowner from an unloyal one? Nearly a year after Halleck's General Order No. 3, there was still disagreement within the ranks. Arthur Reeve, a fierce emancipationist, was enraged when his commanding officer General Robert B. Mitchell followed the dictates of Order No. 3 while the 2nd Kansas troops were in Tennessee. "General Mitchell (our Kansas Brigadier General) seems to have a fixed determination to compel the Brigade to kneel to his idol, slavery," Reeve wrote. "He is meeting with more trouble with the 'Jayhawkers' than he expected, I think."⁶⁴ The Jayhawkers did indeed resist. After Mitchell ordered one of his captains to "find the slaves and put them 'outside of the lines,'" abolitionist Colonel Dan Anthony (of the 7th Kansas) instructed the camp guards to shoot anyone who attempted to eject contrabands.⁶⁵ Mitchell initially gave up on the matter, but after pressure came down from his superior—General J. F. Quinby—Mitchell arrested Captains Dan Anthony and J. L. Merrick. Even with two of the regiment's leading abolitionists under arrest, those who supported the contrabands' quest for freedom were able to effectively disobey the order, with only one exception: a slaveowner identified only as Mrs. Simms retrieved an enslaved woman and two children.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Arthur T. Reeve to John Brown Jr., June 26, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁶⁵ Arthur T. Reeve to John Brown Jr., June 26, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Daniel Anthony was a dedicated abolitionist from Leavenworth and brother to Susan B. Anthony.

⁶⁶ Arthur T. Reeve to John Brown Jr., July 9, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Of course, some cases were unproblematic, much to Halleck's relief. Union Lieutenant Colonel John S. Phelps had some of his slaves within his camp outside Rolla, Missouri, and there was no doubt that Phelps was a loyal citizen.⁶⁷ Halleck strictly enforced Order No. 3 to the best of his ability; however, this order opened the floodgates to a debate about what constituted a legitimate worker, leaving it up to individual commanders to determine the distinction between a forbidden fugitive and a much-needed laborer who could bolster the Union's war effort.

This confusion and inconsistency on the part of the U. S. military made it imperative that slaves who successfully escaped behind Union lines remain vigilant. Shortly after Halleck issued Order No. 3, George Waring attempted to implement Halleck's wishes and ordered all unauthorized slaves out of the camp. Waring's regiment of Hussars had former slaves working as teamsters, personal servants, and nurses.⁶⁸ When his subordinates went to carry out his orders, all the slaves "stoutly asserted that they were free.... Some of them I have no question are so; others I have as little doubt have been slaves but no one is here to prove it and I hesitate to take so serious a responsibility as to decide arbitrarily in the absence of any direct evidence."⁶⁹ This is another instance of slaves taking the initiative to establish their free status even in the face of opposition from Union officials.

⁶⁷ John S. Phelps to G. M. Dodge, December 2, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 781.

⁶⁸ George E. Waring to Henry Halleck, December 19, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 791.

⁶⁹ George E. Waring to Henry Halleck, December 19, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 790-791.

Slaveowners' Responses to Contraband Policy

On occasion, slaveowners appealed to military commanders in the hopes that they could retrieve escaped slaves. In 1862 John Wheelan, who claimed to be a British subject from Mississippi, tangled with Samuel N. Wood, an officer in the 2nd Kansas, over slave ownership. Initially Wheelan managed to take four of his slaves back into custody, but Wood, a dedicated abolitionist, thwarted Wheelan's escape and the slaves were found new homes.⁷⁰ A female cook in Camp Halleck, near Rolla in south-central Missouri, went back into slavery after her owner's son in law entered the camp in December 1861.⁷¹ Chaplain Moore also noted that loyal slaveowners were sometimes permitted within the military camp "to reclaim all his property, slaves as well as the rest, provided he could persuade them to return with him. This was frequently attempted, but in no instance with success that I know of."⁷² Moore's recollection is particularly telling, considering that he wrote this account in 1862, when the military had only recently established a coherent policy regarding contrabands.

In another instance, Lieutenant Colonel John Phelps, a slaveholder himself, had contact with concerned citizens from the area around Rolla, Missouri, who had brought slaves to his camp "for safe-keeping in order to be restored to their

⁷⁰ Unknown author to the editors of the *Democrat*, May 11, 1862, in Samuel Newitt Wood Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. The second page of the letter—which contains the signature—is missing. This incident took place in Rolla, located in central Missouri, when Wood was assigned to a battalion of Missouri soldiers.

⁷¹ George E. Waring to Henry Halleck, December 19, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 790.

⁷² Horace Ladd Moore, "A Kansas Chaplain on the War," February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

owners.”⁷³ Phelps knew some of these slaveowners personally, and some of his own slaves had entered the camp “when the people fled from Springfield and vicinity with wagon and team, clothing and supplies for their support. They feared they might be stolen by persons in the army and they fled to me for protection.”⁷⁴

Even as military officials continued to debate these issues, contraband slaves continued flocking to Union lines. However, whether rational or not, military officers were sometimes suspicious of these former slaves. For instance, one of the motivations behind General Order No. 3 was the fear that some of these slaves could—and would—transmit strategic information about troop numbers and movements to the Confederate forces. Specifically, Adjutant General McMichael ordered “that no such person be hereafter permitted to enter the lines of any camp or of any forces on the march and that any now within such lines be immediately excluded therefrom.”⁷⁵ It was difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

The converse was also true. As Chaplain Horace Moore of the 2nd Kansas Cavalry wrote, “most of them brought us valuable information in regard to the enemy, or the condition of affairs in the neighborhood they left.”⁷⁶ Moore’s account provides insight into the mindset of these contraband slaves. Contrary to other Kansans’ stereotypical assumptions about the feeble intelligence of African Americans, he recognized the contrabands’ cognizance of the situation. He firmly

⁷³ John S. Phelps to Grenville M. Dodge, December 2, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 781.

⁷⁴ John S. Phelps to Grenville M. Dodge, December 2, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 781.

⁷⁵ William McMichael, General Orders No. 3, November 20, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 778.

⁷⁶ Horace Ladd Moore, “A Kansas Chaplain on the War,” February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

believed that “in almost every instance the slaves had a clear understanding...and were ready to cooperate with the army in its war policy.”⁷⁷ Former slaves fully comprehended how their escape benefited the Union cause; they did not need Union soldiers to tell them this. Such a self-awareness and understanding proves that these slaves demonstrated agency in the midst of a chaotic and violent war.

Seeking a New Life in Kansas

Kansas, the state that so many slaves considered a bastion of freedom, was an attractive option for anyone willing to hazard an escape.⁷⁸ Once within the state’s boundaries, black refugees quickly sought out food and lodging (however temporary that shelter may be). A resident of Vermont who traveled to Kansas in 1863, Charles Chase, visited a contraband camp located near Fort Scott. His description focused a great deal on the former slaves, who he characterized as “dirty, shiftless, ignorant specimens,” but his account is still useful as a description of the physical landscape. According to Chase, the camp was located in a timbered ravine with a stream of water nearby for sustenance, and the refugees lived in “bowers and tents...in squads or families, accompanied generally by a span of good mules and a lumber wagon with what ever portables they can seize upon.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Horace Ladd Moore, “A Kansas Chaplain on the War,” February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁷⁸ One example of this is found in the narrative of Bill Simms, who stated that after the Civil War ended he was eager to move to Kansas, “the State I had heard so much about.” See Bill Simms, “Ex Slave Story,” c. 1938, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves*, vol. 6, *Kansas Narratives* (Washington D.C., 1941), 10.

⁷⁹ Charles Chase to the Editor of the Republican, August 19, 1863, in Charles Chase Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

These camps were generally located close to Union lines, although unlike camps in other parts of the South, the military did not specifically set up these camps. Both men and women could find employment in the military camp by working as cooks, servants, grooms, laundresses and teamsters. Andrew Jackson Huntoon, who served as assistant surgeon in the 5th Kansas Cavalry, “hired a negro man, his wife, small boy and wife’s mother to take charge of the hospital washing and ironing. They are first rate help. He wants to go onto my farm, and I think I will let him go in the spring. They came from near Springfield Mo.”⁸⁰ Chaplain Moore of the 2nd Kansas Cavalry had a young boy who worked as his personal servant.⁸¹ James Montgomery and several other officers lived in Fort Scott; one of these officers, Joseph Trego, wrote a letter to his wife describing his living arrangements and noting that they had “a contraband wench for cook.”⁸² This employment in army camps was usually temporary, however, at least within the Kansas Brigade. Many of the slaves who entered behind these lines, located close to the border, passed into Kansas and began a new life within the growing African-American communities of the border counties.⁸³

In the midst of civil unrest throughout the border region, slaves were often able to acquire a few, minimal possessions. John Brown Jr.’s regiment of Jennison’s Jayhawkers, for example, confiscated the physical property of those who were not

⁸⁰ Andrew Huntoon to Elizabeth and Prentiss Huntoon, November 20, 1861, in Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸¹ Horace Ladd Moore, “The Second Kansas Infantry and The Second Kansas Cavalry,” in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸² Langsdorf, “The Letters of Joseph H. Trego: Part Two,” 290.

⁸³ Horace Ladd Moore, “A Kansas Chaplain on the War,” February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

loyal to the Union and loaded slaveowners' wagons "with such household stuff as would be especially needed to set their slaves up in housekeeping in Kansas."⁸⁴ Most refugees' possessions were, however, acquired by the refugees themselves with little aid from Union sources. According to Chaplain Moore, the belongings that usually came alongside refugees consisted primarily of housewares, clothing, and horses, teams, and wagons. If the slaves' former owner had left their home in haste, these men and women could round up as much personal property as they could carry before heading out.⁸⁵ Of course, not all the refugees were so lucky. Mrs. Byron Judd recalled that many of the refugees coming through Wyandotte were "carrying all of their earthly possessions in little bags or bundles, sometimes in red bandana handkerchiefs."⁸⁶

Sickness and disease ran rampant in army camps during the war. It comes as no surprise, then, that contrabands who had contact with the army also suffered from a variety of afflictions. F. R. Newell, Superintendent of Contrabands and a colleague of Chaplain Fisher's, lamented that in his camp there was so much sickness that he desired to send more contrabands to Leavenworth as a way to relieve the pressure. Out of 226 fugitives, ninety six were children and there were "not over 20 capable men."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ John Brown Jr. to Parker Pillsbury, July 18, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. John Brown Jr. and his men had joined the Jayhawkers in November 1861; see "Affairs in Western Missouri; Captain John Brown Jr.'s Men, a Speech of Col. Jennison," *New York Times*, November 12, 1861.

⁸⁵ Horace Ladd Moore, "A Kansas Chaplain on the War," February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸⁶ Perl W. Morgan, "Reminiscent of Wyandotte," *Kansas City Star*, August 18, 1905, in Wyandotte County Clippings, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸⁷ F. R. Newell to H. D. Fisher, August 13, 1863, in Hugh Dunn Fisher Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

There was no shortage of work in the harvesting season for those contrabands who were fit enough for farm labor. John B. Wood, a resident of Lawrence, wrote in late 1861 that “thus far they [contrabands] have been taken care of; as the farmers need help and hundreds if not thousands are now employed in harvesting.”⁸⁸ The drought of 1860 to 1861 was followed by plentiful harvests, and with so many white Kansas men actively fighting in the military, there was a great demand for capable farm labor. The Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* noted this, stating that “almost every farm is supplied with labor in the shape of one or two large, healthy negroes.”⁸⁹ Samuel Reader of Indianola recorded a similar observation in a letter, writing that “a great many farms are not cultivated in this section for want of working men. It would be a great blessing if more darkies would understand their rights and come to our aid.”⁹⁰

Once winter set in, however, it would be difficult for escaped slaves to find gainful employment in farming pursuits. John Wood’s same letter suggested that “no doubt a part of the farmers will provide for those now at work for them, during the winter, but all will not do it.”⁹¹ “Unless our friends from the east assist,” he wrote, “there will be starvation and death among them. There will be much suffering in all events.”⁹² Wood’s letter was addressed to George Stearns, a wealthy New England

⁸⁸ John B. Wood to George L. Stearns, November 19, 1861, in George Luther Stearns Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁸⁹ “Kansas Towns,” *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, August 6, 1863.

⁹⁰ Samuel Reader, “The Letters of Samuel James Reader, 1861-1863,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 9 (May 1940), 151.

⁹¹ John B. Wood to George L. Stearns, November 19, 1861, in George Luther Stearns Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹² John B. Wood to George L. Stearns, November 19, 1861, in George Luther Stearns Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

patron who had helped finance John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry and had enough influence to raise aid for these contrabands.

Other contrabands found work in the growing cities and towns of Kansas. Sarah Ann Richardson worked at Robert Craig's soap factory in Leavenworth. Her uncle, Sam Morton, worked as a cook at the Planter's Hotel in Leavenworth and then on a river steamboat called the "Thomas Morgan."⁹³ After the first train of contrabands arrived in Fort Scott in 1861, citizens of the town were eager to take in able-bodied men, women, and children who could help them around the house or the farm. Chaplain Moore commended the industrious nature of the emigrants, having "proved themselves to be, not a burden, but at least a convenience to the community."⁹⁴ Richard Cordley concurred. He recalled later that even though many of these contrabands were impoverished, they were overall hard-working, self-sufficient individuals, eager to work for regular wages.⁹⁵

Some white Kansans, like Wood and Moore, sympathized with the plight of these black emigrants. However, the fundamental racism that still prevailed in Kansas—regardless of its reputation as the freest of the free states—made some whites resent the fact that black emigrants sometimes refused to work. White residents imposed their own conception of labor and its value onto a population that had a drastically different experience with manual labor. Blacks' refusal to compromise their own principles and receive unfair wages did not sit well with many

⁹³ "The Mother of Port William," *The Atchison Daily Globe*, April 23, 1909, in George Remsburg, *Historical and Other Sketches*, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁴ Horace Ladd Moore, "A Kansas Chaplain on the War," February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁵ Richard Cordley, "The Contrabands from the History of Lawrence," undated, in Douglas County Historical Society Manuscripts, Kansas Collection, SRL.

Kansans. After visiting the thriving town of Fort Scott—which was a major draw for black refugees—Charles Chase wrote about what he claimed was an elevated sense of self-importance among the town’s newest inhabitants. He wrote that:

Sprawled out on the ground in squads, they while away the time, unconcerned about the next meal or the frost of the coming winter. The town [Ft. Scott] offers them work, but they do not incline to accept.... Some are glad to get work and prove their manhood and usefulness; others lounge in idleness, refusing good offers, preferring to live on the hospitality of those who have erected little shanties and are now earning a living.... A poor nigger is often made dizzy by his unexpected elevation.⁹⁶

Unfortunately there is no evidence on hand to determine whether the pay offered to these particular emigrants was actually a fair wage. This example illustrates how black perceptions of labor did not align with whites’ belief that recently freed slaves had a responsibility to seek out gainful employment.

Some Kansans who did sympathize with the contrabands’ suffering took their support to the next level. Chaplains Fisher and Moore were both active in aiding black refugees. Toward the end of 1863, Fisher received instructions from the Western Sanitary Commission and Major General Schofield to travel back East and raise support to alleviate the suffering of these refugees. These contrabands were “reduced to a situation of great misery, and are perishing in large numbers, from neglect, want of clothing, shelter, suitable food and medicine, which, to all who are not in the military service, can only be adequately supplied by the benevolent action

⁹⁶ Charles Chase to Editor of the Republican, August 19, 1863, in Charles Chase Miscellaneous Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. Further evidence that Chase embraced such stereotypes can be found in other letters, where he refers to slaves as “darkeys,” and states that “the natural character of the negro is submissive, obsequious...menial, dependent.”

of the people of the Free States.”⁹⁷ Of course, such compassion on the part of the Western Sanitary Commission was tempered with stereotypical language, much like that of Charles Chase and other members of the general public. In a letter to President Lincoln, the leaders of the commission referred to the “helplessness and improvidence of those who have always been slaves.”⁹⁸

Kansas residents also worked to assist the refugees by founding schools and providing religious instruction. In Wyandotte R. D. Parker, pastor of the Congregational Church, held religious services and instituted a Sunday school.⁹⁹ Chaplain Moore noted in 1862 that Lawrence had established two black churches, and there was another large one in Osawatomie.¹⁰⁰ In these churches there were several African Americans who took on leadership roles. As Richard Cordley remembered, Anthony Oldham was also active in the African American church in Lawrence, and Oldham had “been sort of a preacher among his people—and was ready to conduct services for the new church.... Everybody believed in him, and they all listened to him with respect. He was one of the sturdy kind whose convictions were as firm as a rock.”¹⁰¹ Cordley also recalled that one of the white churches in Lawrence started a night school for adults. This school functioned much like a

⁹⁷ James E. Yeatman to Hugh D. Fisher, November 10, 1863, in Hugh Dunn Fisher Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁸ James E. Yeatman, George Partridge, John B. Johnson, Carlos S. Greeley and William G. Eliot to Abraham Lincoln, November 6, 1863, in Hugh Dunn Fisher Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

⁹⁹ Perl W. Morgan, “Reminiscent of Wyandotte,” *Kansas City Star*, August 18, 1905, in Wyandotte County Clippings, vol. 1, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁰⁰ Horace Ladd Moore, “A Kansas Chaplain on the War,” February 19, 1862, in Military History Collection, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁰¹ Richard Cordley, “The Contrabands from the History of Lawrence,” undated, in Douglas County Historical Society Manuscripts, Kansas Collection, SRL. Cordley also mentioned Gray Strode, who served as deacon of a church in Lawrence and was known for his strong voice and his eloquent prayers.

Sunday School, with a Bible devotional at the opening, singing, and reading of scripture, in addition to time spent learning how to read and write.¹⁰² The men, women, and children who had sought refuge in Kansas were clearly dedicated to education and eager to gain the attendant benefits.

Recruiting Black Troops in Kansas

Some of the male contrabands entering Kansas did more than settle peacefully in the state; many embraced the opportunity to fight for the Union cause. As Dudley Cornish has pointed out, “although the movement to use Negroes made slow progress in the North and East during the first year and a half of war, matters moved more rapidly in the trans-Mississippi West.”¹⁰³ James Lane, hero of the anti-slavery faction in Bleeding Kansas and commander of the Kansas Brigade, spearheaded the movement to put black troops on the front lines, being one of the first to consider enlisting black troops in the war effort. In a letter to General Samuel Sturgis in October 1861, Lane stated that “confiscation of slaves and other property which can be made useful to the army should follow treason as the thunder peal follows the

¹⁰² Richard Cordley, “The Contrabands from the History of Lawrence,” undated, in Douglas County Historical Society Manuscripts, Kansas Collection, SRL.

¹⁰³ Dudley Taylor Cornish, *Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War* (Topeka: Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, 1969), 4. Kansas’s reputation as a bastion of freedom on the frontier made it the perfect candidate for changing Northern attitudes toward the militarization of black soldiers, and Missouri’s status as a Union state encouraged some black enlistments there as well; see George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888), 101. Missouri and Kansas black troops make only a brief appearance in this otherwise comprehensive treatment of African American troops. Williams did, however, offer glowing praise of Kansas’ role in blacks’ recruitment, saying that “Kansas, the child of many prayers and tears, the youngest in the sisterhood of States, consecrated by the blood of freemen to the cause of freedom...took the initiative” (Williams, 101).

lightning flash.”¹⁰⁴ As historian Craig Miner has written, Lane “had an unerring sense of the dramatic.”¹⁰⁵ Though never a proponent of racial equality—at one point he supported the African colonization movement—his outspoken support for the militarization of black refugees was crucial to the formation of black regiments.¹⁰⁶ At the beginning of hostilities, Lincoln had attempted to appease slaveholders in the Union border states by making clear that emancipation and the use of black troops was not a facet of the Union war strategy.¹⁰⁷ Lane made no such assurances. His brigade gained a reputation throughout Missouri as a ruthless band of thieves and ne’er do wells, partly because of Lane’s commitment to emancipation.

Regardless of Lane’s working relationship with Lincoln, this early Kansas enlistment into Lane’s Brigade was not endorsed by the Lincoln administration; prior to the Second Confiscation Act of July 1862, former slaves were not mustered into the regular army and only fought locally in skirmishes with guerrilla forces on the border. A report by the Committee on Military Affairs stated that “the mustering of the men forming this regiment...was without direct authority, and was in many

¹⁰⁴ James Lane to S. D. Sturgis, October 3, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 1, Pt. IV (1894), 772. However, in typical Lane style, he spoke from both sides of his mouth. In this same letter, he assured the general that his men were “not here for the purpose of interfering in anywise with the institution of slavery. They shall not become negro thieves nor shall they be prostituted into negro-catchers. The institution of slavery must take care of itself.”

¹⁰⁵ Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 90.

¹⁰⁶ Miner, 90.

¹⁰⁷ It was not until Lincoln began contemplating emancipation’s significance to the war effort, which culminated in the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, that black enlistment could become a central facet of the recruitment efforts in the North. Because this proclamation only freed slaves living in states under rebellion, it did not apply to slaves in Missouri since it was (nominally) a part of the Union. See Foner, *Forever Free*, 50. For this reason, the proclamation does not play a central role in this chapter’s discussion of emancipation.

respect[s] informal and irregular.”¹⁰⁸ Several military officials, including General Henry Halleck, protested Lane’s actions and open flouting of authority, but to no avail.

Disregarding orders from above, Lane continued to encourage enlistment by offering black soldiers \$10 per month and an emancipation certificate.¹⁰⁹ However, because he did not receive authorization, these men were not officially mustered into the army until later. Lane’s recruitment style was, at times, unconventional. His conviction that blacks should fight for their own freedom pushed him to make radical statements about blacks’ role in the war. Historian Dudley Cornish went so far as to call these tactics “impressment,” an accurate description.¹¹⁰ At one point Lane declared that “negroes are mistaken if they think white men can fight for them while they stay at home.... We don’t want to threaten, but we have been saying that you would fight, and if you won’t fight we will make you.”¹¹¹ Word of Lane’s tactics trickled down to the public. A newspaper article on the newly-created 1st Kansas Colored, which was the successor to Lane’s informal black regiment, maintained that the regiment’s “ranks were filled by the forcible and illegal seizure of negroes in different parts of the State.”¹¹² Many of these unwilling recruits, according to the article, had been given no warning. This trend would continue through the rest of the war in both Kansas and Missouri.

¹⁰⁸ Senate Report No. 1214, 51st Congress, 1st session, in James Monroe Williams Papers, KSHS. Interestingly, this report also argued that Lane was merely a tool in a larger project to use black troops; Davis stated that “Kansas, which had been the center of the slavery convulsions preceding the war, was naturally chosen as the locality” (2).

¹⁰⁹ Roy Bird, *Civil War in Kansas* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2004), 65.

¹¹⁰ Cornish, *Kansas Negro Regiments*, 7-8.

¹¹¹ Bird, 65.

¹¹² “The Negro Regiment,” *Atchison Freedom’s Champion*, January 24, 1863.

Other commanders also used abusive techniques, perhaps subconsciously reenacting the paternalism inherent in the slave system by asserting themselves as being in control of black bodies. In 1865 some soldiers in the Independent Colored Battery at Fort Leavenworth, who spent their enlistment building fortifications around the town, complained about their treatment in a petition to Captain H. Ford Douglas that they “were pressed into Service by force of numbers without any Law civil or millitry to sanction it. Many of us were knocked down and beaten Like dogs. Others were dragged from our homes in the dead hour of [night].”¹¹³ The fifty-three men who signed the petition requested that they be mustered out of the service. Douglas apparently sided with the soldiers, since the next day he wrote a letter to General Mitchell informing him of the unorthodox methods that General Curtis (or someone under his command) had employed in “recruiting” these men. Douglas had perhaps seen some of this first hand, since he also described how, even before he “became connected with company I have seen men dragged through the streets of Leavenworth from their wives and little ones who were dependent upon them for their daily bread—mid winter, and placed on the bleak knob of Fort Sully, and there starved until from shere exhaustion they were compeled to swear into the service.”¹¹⁴ Why Douglas did not report this behavior immediately after witnessing it—if he had indeed done so—is unclear. Perhaps he had been concerned about potential career repercussions, but now that the war was over he may have felt more confident in speaking out against such injustice. What this story does demonstrate is that even in

¹¹³ Gabriel Grays, et. al., to Capt. H. Ford Douglas, June 19, 1865, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 421.

¹¹⁴ H. Ford Douglas to Headquarters of the Post of Fort Leavenworth, June 20, 1865, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 422.

Kansas, a state with a reputation for supporting freed men and women, military officers were not above mistreating the free black populace to achieve their own ends.

There were, of course, legitimate recruits who rose out of the growing contraband population in Kansas. James Williams, who would later command the 1st Kansas Colored, affirmed that “the work of recruiting went forward with rapidity, the intelligent portion of the colored people entering heartily into the work and evincing by their actions a willing readiness to link their fate and share the perils with their white brethren in the war of the great rebellion.”¹¹⁵ Two of the most well respected members of the 1st Kansas Colored were William Matthews and Patrick Minor. Matthews had convinced dozens of former slaves to enlist in Lane’s brigade (unofficially, of course), and he resumed that work by aiding in the creation of six companies for the 1st Kansas, while Patrick Minor joined the 1st Kansas in 1862 and fought in the skirmish at Island Mound, Missouri.¹¹⁶ By all accounts, the quality of the recruits was exceptional.

Many of those who served with Lane’s Brigade as un-mustered troops, and who saw action in Missouri during 1862, did enter the service officially, much to the joy of African Americans throughout the nation, including Frederick Douglass.¹¹⁷

The first authorized black regiment to come out of Kansas was designated the 1st

¹¹⁵ James Monroe Williams to T. J. Anderson, undated, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹¹⁶ Roger D. Cunningham, “Douglas’s Battery at Fort Leavenworth: The Issue of Black Officers During the Civil War,” *Kansas History* 23 (Winter 2000-2001), 205-206. Matthews did not serve with the 1st Kansas, however, because they refused to commission a black officer. The rest of his story will appear later in the chapter. According to historian Roger Cunningham, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton did finally agree to authorize Matthew’s commission, but Matthews was absent on the day that the commissions were decided so his place was given to a white man. Until he joined the Douglas Independent Battery stationed at Fort Leavenworth, as a commissioned officer, he worked as a city policeman. See Cunningham, “Douglas’s Battery,” 206.

¹¹⁷ “The Colored Soldiers in Kansas—The Zouaves d’Afrique,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, January 1863.

Kansas Colored, which entered the service at Fort Scott on January 13, 1863, under the command of James Williams.¹¹⁸ Williams had served as a captain in the 5th Kansas Cavalry until he accepted the position as lieutenant colonel of the 1st Kansas. He was among the first to endorse the arming of former slaves and Northern free blacks, believing that blacks could, “by displays of courage and self-control...demonstrate their fitness for the freedom that awaited them and the higher duties of citizenship with which they were to be vested.”¹¹⁹ This attitude was not typical of military officers at the time. Black troops had seen some action in previous wars, but they had not been tested in battle in a large-scale conflict like the Civil War. Uneasy with the concept of having armed African Americans at the front lines, some military commanders in the East balked at attempts to enlist black volunteers. Such hesitation was not the norm for Union officers on the Kansas-Missouri border.

Recruiting Black Troops in Missouri

Because of Missouri’s tenuous situation as a slaveholding Union state, most Missouri officers did not actively promote enlistment to the enslaved population. The recruitment process in Missouri did not begin in full force until 1863, after the state legislature passed a gradual emancipation law. General John Schofield, the new commander in chief of the Department of the Missouri, initiated recruitment efforts to pacify the secessionist population. He ordered Colonel William Pile, of the 33rd Missouri Volunteers, to enlist slaves whose owners were disloyal (but not to

¹¹⁸ Cornish, *Kansas Negro Regiments*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Committee on Military Affairs, House Report No. 2971, 51st Congress, 1st session, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

encourage the slaves of loyal masters to join the military).¹²⁰ By the end of September 1863 Pile had enlisted virtually everyone who fell under the parameters of his orders, but in order to strengthen the military further, a change in recruitment tactics was required. Schofield began to contemplate enlisting the slaves of loyal masters, but unsurprisingly slaveholders did not appreciate this policy and appealed to President Lincoln, who sided in their favor.¹²¹ However, in November of that year Lincoln finally sanctioned this change, and Schofield issued General Order No. 135 which stipulated that each slaveholder who was loyal to the Union “was to be compensated ‘not to exceed \$300’ for each of his slaves that enlisted.”¹²² This order had originally stated that the provost marshals should attempt to “circulate the provisions of this order among slaveholders and slaves,” but that had been deleted from the first draft, a fact that Pile called “an office secret.”¹²³ In keeping the particulars quiet, military officers were following Lincoln’s lead, which focused on keeping the border slaveholding states within the Union no matter the repercussions for the enslaved population that longed for emancipation.

Unsurprisingly, Missouri slaveholders deeply resented any attempts to arm blacks, a fear hearkening back to pre-war fears of an armed black populace rising up in insurrection. In central Missouri, near the capital of Columbia, there were “a large number of slaveholders living close together, they are arming themselves and

¹²⁰ John Blassingame, “The Recruitment of Negro Troops in Missouri During the Civil War,” *Missouri Historical Review* 58 (April 1964), 329.

¹²¹ Blassingame, 329-330.

¹²² Nelson, 264.

¹²³ Testimony of William A. Pile before the American Freedman’s Inquiry Commission, November 29, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 235.

procuring ammunition, to intimidate the negroes from coming in to enlist.”¹²⁴ Slaves in western Missouri counties no doubt faced similar physical attacks and had to wade through the misinformation that slaveholders used to keep slaves docile.

Slaveholders, who knew that most members of the slave community could not read, maintained that Union officers would be cruel to blacks and that they might even sell slaves down South to bring in extra income.¹²⁵ Slaves who were illiterate did not always have the means to discern falsehoods from the truth of the matter; encountering Union troops face-to-face might change their opinion of white soldiers, but it could also serve to reinforce lingering fears of intimidation and abuse.

Overall, the system of recruitment in Missouri from late 1863 until the end of the war was haphazard. Some provost marshals sent black troops into the countryside to actively locate recruits, while in some areas of the state provost marshals would only accept recruits who came to the enlistment office of their own volition. In the words of William Pile, “they will enlist such as they are called upon to enlist, or such as come to them; but they will take no trouble to extend a knowledge of the order [Order No. 135] to the slave population.”¹²⁶ These provost marshals likely worried that advertising Order No. 135 would make it even more difficult to control the slaveholding population, many of whom were already disloyal or had contemplated joining in the Confederate cause.

¹²⁴ Testimony of William A. Pile before the American Freedman’s Inquiry Commission, November 29, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 233.

¹²⁵ Testimony of William A. Pile before the American Freedman’s Inquiry Commission, November 29, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 233. These accusations sometimes had a grain of truth; for instance, Pile stated that slaveholders told slaves that they would not receive pay for serving in the Union army, and that they would be mistreated in other ways.

¹²⁶ Testimony of William A. Pile before the American Freedman’s Inquiry Commission, November 29, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 233.

Sometimes enlistment practices in Missouri, as in Kansas, took a more forward approach. According to correspondence by a slaveholder in Farmington, Missouri, named E. P. Cayce, the 3rd Missouri Cavalry came through the area in 1863, and “night before last several of the men came to the Cabins, collected the Negroes together and lectured them for several hours, the consequences was that they (the negroes) could not resist the glowing pictures presented to them.”¹²⁷ However, when these enslaved men learned that they would be required to leave their families for long periods of time, many refused to enlist. Their reasons for this refusal may have stemmed from a fear that their families would be abused in their absence, a concern that was not without a basis in fact. Or, perhaps their situation at the Cayce farm was stable enough that they chose to bide their time. Whatever the rationale was, other slaves in the area had apparently taken up on the recruiter’s offers, or had otherwise escaped; Cayce wrote that “they have about stripped Cooks Settlement & Fredericktown of negroes—the crops are rotting in the Fields for want of Harvest hands.”¹²⁸

As it turns out, the commander of this Missouri regiment, J. M. Glover, had not approved these actions, declaring that “the conduct of the recruiting officer,—such as going to the house of a loyal man & forcibly taking his Slaves, horses, & wagons—is an act of lawlessness.”¹²⁹ This response is a perfect example of the fine line that Missouri commanders toed in their attempts to ensure the loyalty of slaveholders, and thus maintain at least the appearance of control over a region so

¹²⁷ E. P. Cayce to M. P. Cayce, June 19, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 227.

¹²⁸ E. P. Cayce to M. P. Cayce, June 19, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 227.

¹²⁹ E. P. Cayce to M. P. Cayce, June 19, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 228.

deeply divided on the issue of slavery and the military's conduct during the affair. The enlistment numbers in Missouri, unsurprisingly were quite small; by February 1864 there were only about 3,700 African American recruits from that state.¹³⁰

Challenges of Military Service

Because racial prejudice remained rampant throughout the military, black troops regularly encountered stereotypes and discrimination on the basis of race.¹³¹ One such stereotype was the belief that black troops would not perform adequately in the heat of battle, since blacks inhabited an inferior social status that limited their courage, and that consequently there should be no allowance for black officers. Additionally, as historian Roger Cunningham has noted, many whites erroneously concluded that black soldiers themselves would prefer serving under the command of white officers, even though these white officers were not always up to the task.¹³² Even though he played an integral role in recruiting for the 1st Kansas Colored, William Matthews was denied an officer's commission on account of his race. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton did finally agree to authorize Matthew's

¹³⁰ Nelson, 264. According to the 1860 Missouri census, there were 118,503 African Americans (both free and slave) in the state. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Slave Schedules (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864) and Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Population Schedules (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864).

¹³¹ For an excellent discussion of white officers' attitudes toward black soldiers, see Chapter 5 of Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). He argues that white officers' perceptions of African Americans were shaped by caricatures from literature and the media, not by personal interactions; "what developed among the white officers was a particularly contradictory portrait of blacks as a whole, varying in composition from one officer to the next, and at times overlapping, but in almost every case rooted in prejudice. Racist sentiments in the white officer corps, then, took diverse forms as individuals twisted events and experiences to meet their preconceptions while diminishing or overlooking everything that discredited them" (Glatthaar, 82).

¹³² Cunningham, "Douglas's Battery," 202.

commission, but Matthews was absent on the day that the commissions were decided so his place was given to a white man. Until he joined the Douglass Independent Battery stationed at Fort Leavenworth he worked as a city policeman.¹³³ Patrick Minor was in a similar situation; he left the 1st Kansas Colored in 1863 when he found out he would not receive a commission. These examples illustrate how deep-seated racial discrimination was within the armed forces.

To some white officers in Kansas, however, the refusal to allow officer's commissions to talented soldiers like Matthews and Minor was ridiculous. Twenty-one white officers penned a letter to Lane stating that Matthews was "among the most thorough and efficient officers in our organization; a soldier in every sense of the term, drilled, disciplined, and capable."¹³⁴ Matthews himself wrote to Lane and insisted that his contribution to the regiment's formation demanded that he receive a commission. Finally, both Matthews and Minor became black officers in Douglas's Battery, which consisted of 140 men stationed at Fort Leavenworth, tasked with garrison duty. Some members of the unit did see action as they defended Kansas against Sterling Price's northern advance in 1864, but for the most part their time in the army was uneventful. That said, this was the only African American unit in the United States army that had only black officers, a testament to the achievements of Matthews, Minor, and the other former slaves who populated its ranks.¹³⁵

¹³³ Cunningham, "Douglas's Battery," 206.

¹³⁴ Cunningham, "Douglas's Battery," 205.

¹³⁵ Cunningham, "Douglas's Battery," 216. For additional information on the relationships between black soldiers and white officers, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

Figure 13: Douglas's Independent Colored Battery, 1864



Carte de visite of Douglas's battery on the grounds of Fort Leavenworth, courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

Another of the greatest concerns for African-American enlistees was whether or not they would receive compensation equal to that received by their white peers; throughout the western theater, as in other reaches of the country, it became clear early on that black troops would not collect equal pay and benefits. During the first months of black recruitment in Kansas, those troops did not receive any pay (partly because their enlistment was not officially sanctioned in the first place). Many of these troops were “intelligent free negroes—some having a good business at home, others leaving their families without any support; they have been kept together without pay & under but a quasi organization. They are now two months in camp and

no one can tell what is to be done with them.”¹³⁶ These men were understandably frustrated, and that frustration manifested itself in a “growing restlessness and insubordination.”¹³⁷ White officers like James Williams, who was commander of the 1st Kansas Colored (which later became the 79th USCT), wrote with great concern that the paymaster had paid white troops but had not distributed any to his men. He placed the blame squarely in the hands of the government, which was at fault for these “long trials and sufferings.”¹³⁸ Although the black troops’ perspective on this situation can only be partially discerned within the writings of white officers, they undoubtedly resented this disparate treatment and spoke about it candidly with officers like Williams. The strict hierarchy of the military, combined with a racial hierarchy that privileged the words of white officers, dictated that black troops had to rely on advocates within the higher ranks to present their pleas to the appropriate authorities.

Once a pay schedule was finally set in 1863, black troops received ten dollars per month, with three dollars going toward their clothing allowance; white soldiers received thirteen dollars and had 50 cents more allotted toward their clothing allowance. Black troops were understandably indignant at their disparate treatment. Some white military officials, like William Pile, sympathized with the plight of these enlistees; Pile testified before the Freedman’s Inquiry Commission that the system “should be revised, beyond all question.... By increasing the pay of non-

¹³⁶ N. P. Chipman to Samuel R. Curtis, October 16, 1862, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 71.

¹³⁷ John M. Williams to H. Q. Loring, April 21, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 72.

¹³⁸ John M. Williams to H. Q. Loring, April 21, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 72.

commissioned officers, an increased motive to application would be furnished the negro, not only to learn his duty as a soldier, but to...prepare himself for his duties as a citizen.”¹³⁹ Pile accurately recognized that this was more than just a monetary issue; troop morale depended in large part on whether or not these soldiers felt that they were considered an essential component of the war effort.

Through all of these challenges, African-American troops dealt with the difficulties of battle, monotonous boredom of camp life, and legitimate concerns about their loved ones who remained at home. White troops encountered these same difficulties, but many black soldiers had the added stress of worrying about loved ones who were still enslaved. With Missouri slaveholders unsure of the institution’s future and angered by slaves’ exodus into free states, there were serious repercussions for the families of those who enlisted in the Union cause. Violence, an element of the slave system crucial to securing whites’ control over the enslaved population (which was increasingly dwindling), continued unabated throughout the war. In 1863 Martha Glover, whose husband Richard was serving with the 2nd Missouri Colored Volunteers, wrote her husband, admonishing him for leaving his family behind. She had warned him before his departure that his absence would have powerful repercussions for the family. “You recollect what I told you how they would do after you was gone,” she wrote. “They abuse me because you went & say they will not take care of our children & do nothing but quarrel with me all the time and beat me

¹³⁹ Testimony of William A. Pile before the American Freedman’s Inquiry Commission, November 29, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 376.

scandalously the day before yesterday.”¹⁴⁰ Richard had only been absent for two or three weeks, and Martha was heavily pregnant with six children to care for.

Superintendent Pile took interest in the situation and corresponded with General William Rosecrans on Glover’s behalf. Only a few short weeks after Martha penned her letter, her owner George Cardwell attempted to take her and the children into Kentucky for sale; after hearing of this, Pile “went in person immediately to the Scobee House [where Martha and the children were being confined and] took possession of the woman and children.”¹⁴¹ Since Caldwell was believed to be a “rebel,” the Emancipation Proclamation dictated that the Glover family be considered free. Although none of the correspondence states that this did indeed come about, Pile’s commitment to aiding soldier’s families suggested that Martha and her children did gain their freedom. His letters and testimonies before the Freedman’s Inquiry Commission make clear that black soldiers had very legitimate fears about their family’s safety, making enlistment in the army even more of a sacrifice than it was for white enlistees.

This situation was not uncommon. In March 1864, a provost marshal in Missouri informed his superiors that “the wife of a colored recruit came into my Office to night and says she has been severely beaten and driven from home by her master and owner. She has a child some two years old with her, and says she left two

¹⁴⁰ Martha Glover to Richard Glover, December 30, 1863, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 244.

¹⁴¹ William Pile to General William Rosecrans, February 23, 1864, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 245.

larger ones at home.”¹⁴² This unnamed woman had hoped to join her husband and gain employment. Only a month earlier, Pile lamented that the wives and children of black soldiers were suffering inhumane treatment, such as being sold down South, forced to perform hard labor, and generally facing “awful abuse.”¹⁴³ The situation was dire. A lieutenant named Jeff Mayhall implored that the superintendent, “for the sake of down trodden humanity, use your influence to have the negro recruiting Stopped—or else protect the families of the poor Soldiers who are enlisting to defend the Government.”¹⁴⁴

African American Troops in Combat

Lane’s Kansas Brigade—which consisted of ten regiments—could arguably be considered the first brigade to use black troops in regular combat. On October 28, 1862, some of Lane’s African-American troops engaged the enemy near the small hamlet of Butler in Bates County, Missouri, a notorious stretch of terrain under the control of Confederate irregulars. According to the *Leavenworth Conservative*, “it is useless to talk anymore about negro courage—the men fought like tigers...and the main difficulty was to hold them well in hand.”¹⁴⁵ On October 27 and 28, 1862, these troops again encountered bushwhackers, this time near Island Mound. With a force

¹⁴² Hiram Cornell to J. P. Sanderson, March 28, 1864, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 688.

¹⁴³ Jeff Mayhall to William A. Pile, February 4, 1864, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 242-243.

¹⁴⁴ Jeff Mayhall to William A. Pile, February 4, 1864, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 243.

¹⁴⁵ Cornish, *Kansas Negro Regiments*, 7.

of only 225 men, the white and black soldiers who fought side by side managed to hold off a rebel force that was twice their size, with only eighteen casualties.¹⁴⁶

The 1st Kansas Colored saw action in various states along the western frontier: Baxter Springs, Kansas, Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, and Poison Springs, Arkansas. In a skirmish in Jasper County, not far from their post near Baxter Springs in southeast Kansas, Confederate forces attacked a small scouting party composed of both black and white soldiers. Williams attempted a prisoner exchange, but the Confederate leader, Livingston, “utterly refused to exchange the colored prisoners.”¹⁴⁷ Shortly after this Williams learned that Livingston had executed one of the black prisoners. Williams responded by executing one of the Confederate soldiers who had been taken captive. Apparently Williams’ equivocation “ended the barbarous practice of killing prisoners so far as Livingston was concerned.”¹⁴⁸ The Southern attitude toward black troops, driven by a maniacal fear of slave uprisings and armed rebellion, made it difficult for black regiments to follow the code of war. In addition to fighting prejudice at home, black troops and the white officers of the 1st Kansas faced even greater challenges on the battlefield.

A similar incident occurred in Poison Springs, Arkansas, after a battle where the 1st Kansas had approximately forty percent of its fighting force killed or

¹⁴⁶ James Monroe Williams to T. J. Anderson, undated, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁴⁷ James Monroe Williams to T. J. Anderson, undated, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁴⁸ James Monroe Williams to T. J. Anderson, undated, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS. For additional discussion of this massacre, see Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 145-146.

wounded.¹⁴⁹ Williams learned from witnesses that black soldiers who were taken prisoner “were murdered on the spot.”¹⁵⁰ In April 1864, the 2nd Kansas Colored saw action at Jenkins Ferry, in Arkansas, and these soldiers paid memory to those lost by crying out “Remember Poison Springs!” in the midst of battle.¹⁵¹

In the fall of 1864, Confederate General Sterling Price began marching his contingent of about twelve thousand men toward Missouri, veering west toward the cities and towns along the Kansas-Missouri border. Without question this struck fear into the hearts of every Kansan, and also some Missourians. To prepare a defense, General Samuel Curtis, head of the Department of Kansas, gained permission from Kansas governor Thomas Carney to call up the Kansas State Militia. This militia was, according to Kansas’ 1864 militia act, to be populated only with white men; General Curtis sidestepped this mandate and ordered all male residents between the ages of eighteen and sixty to join in defending their homes. Because these were only militia units attached to more organized regiments, there were no formal muster rolls to describe the exact makeup of these units. Some militia units did have black officers; at least five of the officers from Leavenworth were leaders in their black community and statewide.¹⁵² Of the one thousand black militiamen in Kansas who served, many helped repel Price at the Battle of the Blue and the Battle of Westport, both in Jackson County, Missouri.

¹⁴⁹ Committee on Military Affairs, House Report No. 2971, 51st Congress, 1st session, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁵⁰ James M. Williams, Report on Poison Springs, April 24, 1864, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁵¹ Cornish, *Kansas Negro Regiments*, 14.

¹⁵² Roger D. Cunningham, “Welcoming ‘Pa’ on the Kaw: Kansas’s ‘Colored’ Militia and the 1864 Price Raid,” *Kansas History* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2002), 93.

The five infantry regiments that were created in Missouri—the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Missouri Colored Infantries—primarily saw action outside of the state or were stationed at Benton Barracks, a Union encampment and recruiting center just a few miles north of St. Louis.¹⁵³ The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Colored Infantries, which became the 65th, 67th, and 68th Regiments of the United States Colored Troops, spent much of their time in Missouri marching, serving on picket duty, and performing other manual labor. The first real battlefield experience of the 62nd USCT was during Sterling Price's raid in 1864, when they clashed with Confederate forces near Glasgow, Missouri. The regiment then moved to Port Hudson, Louisiana, as part of a contingent to hold that key site on the Mississippi River, before they headed further south to Brazos Santiago, Texas. There, alongside the 24th Indiana Veteran Volunteers, they unsuccessfully assaulted a Confederate outpost at Palmetto Ranch in what became known as the last battle of the Civil War (taking place in May 1865, after Lee's surrender at Appomattox).¹⁵⁴ Overall, black troops in Missouri did not see action in as many battles as did the Kansas regiments.

Commanders on the frontier offered nothing but praise for the dedication of the black troops under their command. Reports and correspondence between military officers attests to this. Even before the recruits around Ft. Scott saw any real action, N. P. Chipman, the chief of staff for the Department of the Missouri noted during his inspection that the troops were “highly satisfactory—They exhibit a proficiency in the

¹⁵³ Jacob Gilbert Forman, *The Western Sanitary Commission; A Sketch of Its Origin, History, Labors for the Sick and Wounded of the Western Armies, and Aid Given to Freedmen and Union Refugees, with Incidents of Hospital Life* (St. Louis: R. P. Studley, 1864), 74.

¹⁵⁴ Jeffrey William Hunt, *The Last Battle of the Civil War: Palmetto Ranch* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 65-66.

manual and in company evolutions truly surprising and the best company is the one officered by black men.... I know I have seen very many Regts longer in the service than these which would appear badly beside them.”¹⁵⁵

Officials who saw the troops in action agreed. In 1863, General James Blunt stated it best when he wrote:

I never saw such fighting as was done by the negro regiment at the Battle of Honey Springs. They fought like veterans, with a coolness and valor that is unsurpassed. They preserved their line perfect throughout the whole engagement and, although in the hottest of the fight, they never once faltered. Too much praise cannot be awarded for their gallantry. The question that negroes will fight is settled; besides, they make better soldiers in every respect than any troops I have ever had under my command.¹⁵⁶

Williams made similar statements about the men in his regiment, speaking highly of their “chivalrous and soldierly conduct.”¹⁵⁷ On December 13, 1864, the 1st Kansas Colored became the 79th United States Colored Troops, and Williams remained in command.

However, unlike Williams and other western commanders, not everyone in the North was pleased with the prospect of having an armed African American population. Secretary of the U. S. Census, Joseph C. G. Kennedy, argued that “the fact is evident that the colored population in the Northern and Western States holds an inferior place physically to the whites, and could hardly be relied upon to supply

¹⁵⁵ N. P. Chipman to Samuel R. Curtis, October 16, 1862, in Berlin et. al., *Freedom: A Documentary History*, 71.

¹⁵⁶ James G. Blunt, Report on the Battle of Honey Springs, July 17, 1863, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁵⁷ James Williams to William A. Phillips, July 1863, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

proportionate numbers of able-bodied men.”¹⁵⁸ Some government leaders on the border found ways to inhibit the enlistment of black soldiers. According to Williams, these “complications with the civil authorities” included a severe prejudice against African Americans based solely on their race.¹⁵⁹ The prevailing belief was that “the negro race did not possess necessary qualifications to make efficient soldiers.”¹⁶⁰ Williams and his white officers were so hindered by the machinations of these government officials that he and his men simply began to ignore their opposition’s arguments against black troops.

Testimonies like that of General Blunt supported the emancipationist cause. Strong, healthy male contrabands were a boon to the army. Less than two months after the Emancipation Proclamation became official on January 1, 1863, Joseph Kennedy reported to the Secretary of the Interior, John P. Usher, that there were around 91,000 able-bodied African American males between the ages of 18 and 45. Of that number, Kennedy believed that Kansas would supply only 126.¹⁶¹ What Kennedy did not take into account was the fact that the black population in the state was growing daily, and in fact contrabands from both Kansas and Missouri were essential to the Union efforts in the West.

In the end, approximately 2,083 black Kansans and 8,344 black Missourians served during the Civil War. These troops, drawn from the ranks of contraband

¹⁵⁸ Joseph C. G. Kennedy to John P. Usher, February 11, 1863, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series III, Vol. 3 (1899), 44.

¹⁵⁹ James Monroe Williams to T. J. Anderson, undated, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁶⁰ James Monroe Williams to T. J. Anderson, undated, in James Monroe Williams Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

¹⁶¹ Joseph C. G. Kennedy to John P. Usher, February 11, 1863, in *War of the Rebellion*, Series III, Vol. 3 (1899), 43.

slaves from Missouri and other parts of the South, did much to change the demographics of the border region. Some black soldiers who survived the war settled permanently in Kansas, forming communities alongside other contraband slaves who

Figure 14: William D. Matthews in Uniform, c. 1864



Photo of William D. Matthews in Civil War uniform, courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

were legally freed after the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. Kansas's black population in 1860 (including enslaved and free blacks) was only 816, but by

the end of the war the official tally was near 13,000. This great influx of black emigrants would continue well into the post-war period of the great exodus.¹⁶²

Meanwhile, Missouri's population was also in flux. The free black population in Missouri border counties in 1860 was only 233, but the total African American population was approximately 14,544.¹⁶³ By 1870, the black population in those border counties was only 10,918. This decrease reflects how Missouri slaves fled to other states during the war, particularly their western neighbor of Kansas. Also, some former slaves from the Deep South who had made their way North chose to settle in Missouri after the war had ended and peace finally came to the border region.

The situation that existed along the Kansas-Missouri line was unlike the situation on another border between a free state and a slave state. Kansans and Missourians were already well acquainted with guerrilla warfare by 1861. The violence along this border had begun nearly seven years before South Carolina militiamen launched the first cannon shot at Fort Sumter. Now, however, the violence was more than a battle over the extension of slavery into the territories—it was a conflict that threatened the very existence of the Union. A Missouri population divided in loyalty clashed with the free-state military units who had effectively made Kansas a free state, and throughout this conflict the black population of the border

¹⁶² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Slave Schedules (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864).

¹⁶³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Slave Schedules (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864). The breakdown by county for the 1860 free black population in Missouri is as follows (in ascending order): Vernon (2), Cass/Van Buren (3), Bates (8), Clay (43), Buchanan (51), Platte (56), and Jackson (70). Also, the total African American population on the border in 1860 in ascending order was: Vernon (138), Bates (450), Cass (1013), Buchanan (2062), Platte (3369), and Jackson (4014).

found new challenges and fresh opportunities to make a life for themselves in the “promised land.”

CONCLUSION

In 1879 an African American newspaper in Topeka, called the *Colored Citizen*, reflected on the many black refugees from the South seeking to make a new life for themselves in Kansas. According to the article, a white Southerner acting as “the agent for the planters of Louisiana,” was attempting to coerce these “Exodusters” into returning to their former owners’ plantations.¹ However, these men and women “know too much to return to the land of shot guns and bulldozers,” the article stated. “Liberty is too sweet to be thrown away.”² Thus, in the period of the great Exodus from the South, approximately 40,000 former slaves entered Northern states like Kansas, many coming from as far away as Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana.³ This exodus began immediately after the war’s end, but with the collapse of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, the tide of African American emigration took on a new urgency in the late 1870s and early 1880s.⁴ Of course on the Kansas-Missouri border, as elsewhere in the Upper South, this migration had begun much earlier with emancipation, as slaves took control of

¹ This term was a reference to the Biblical story of Jewish slaves in Egypt who fled to the promised land of Canaan. See Jonathan Earle, *The Routledge Atlas of African American History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 68.

² “The Refugees,” *Topeka Colored Citizen*, May 31, 1879.

³ Jeremy Neely, *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 151. Nell Painter has determined that in 1879, the year of “Kansas Fever,” at least 6,000 Southern blacks entered Kansas. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*, new ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 184-185.

⁴ For further discussion of Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

their own mobility and engineered paths of resistance that gave them increased agency over their own futures.

As for all residents of the border—black, white, and native—the sectional strife that ravaged these counties in the previous decades had for the most part passed away by the 1870s and 1880s. Reconstruction took on a different meaning for Missouri, since it did not secede from the Union and was not subject to either presidential or congressional plans for Reconstruction. However, during the Civil War the state contained a strong pro-Confederate faction both in the state government and within the general population. Likewise, those who witnessed the guerrilla warfare in western Missouri and were victims of depredations on the part of the Union military had some difficulty moving forward.⁵ At the war's end western Missouri, at least the counties south of the Kansas City area, was in ruins. As one Kansan noted in his travels in western Missouri, "as far as the eye could reach in every direction you could see lone chimneys standing singly and in pairs, all that was left at that time of what was called good homesteads."⁶ An essential part of the recovery process involved restoration of basic necessities such as road maintenance and public schools. In most cases, these concerns were the responsibility of local officials and everyday citizens, including many who were struggling to pick up the pieces of their former lives. For the most part, western Missouri counties simply did

⁵ For some examples of continued animosity between Union and Confederate veterans, consult Jeremy Neely, *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 141.

⁶ Charles W. Goodlander, *Memoirs and Recollections of Charles W. Goodlander of the Early Days of Fort Scott* (Fort Scott, KS: Monitor Printing, 1899), 107.

not have the resources to help any emigrants who were destitute, and old prejudices certainly worked against refugees who were African American.

Additionally, with a tide of new white emigrants from Midwestern states like Indiana and Ohio, and Exodusters coming northward in large numbers, the demographic and cultural makeup of the Kansas-Missouri line was becoming even more diverse.⁷ In particular, the process of rebuilding Missouri's infrastructure opened opportunities for white emigrants and some enterprising Kansas neighbors to become involved in Missouri politics and economic boosterism. Some of these Kansans had lived in Missouri, having relocated to a safer environment just across the line amidst the chaos of Civil War.⁸ Some black emigrants settled in Missouri, but for the most part the Exodus movement focused on Kansas, which had a reputation for being a state welcoming to African Americans.⁹

In short, the post-war period saw increased economic development, growing industrialization, newfound cooperation between Kansas and Missouri, and the development of a new, free society. Most importantly, emancipation restructured existing relationships between former slaves and their former owners. As James

⁷ Neely, 146.

⁸ Thanks to General Ewing's Order No. 11, issued on August 25, 1863, as a response to Quantrill's raid on Lawrence, Kansas, virtually the entire population of Cass, Bates, and Vernon counties had been expelled from their homes and forced to relocate elsewhere in Missouri or across the border in Kansas. Frequently, when these people returned to their homes after the war, there were nothing left. Bates County, as one example, had been completely depopulated. When new immigrants and original settlers returned in the post-war period, the demographics of the county changed radically. According to the 1860 census, "more than two-thirds of Bates County's residents had been born in Missouri or other states within the Upper South. A decade later, settlers from those states accounted for less than half the county's residents" (Neely, 147). For further discussion of Order No. 11, see Albert Castel, "Order No. 11 and the Civil War on the Border" *Missouri Historical Review* 57 (July 1863): 357-368.

⁹ There are many letters in the Kansas State Historical Society that Southern blacks wrote to the governor, John P. St. John, stating they had heard about Kansas and wanted to make a new life for themselves in a free state. For examples, see John P. St. John Correspondence, in Governor's Papers, Library and Archives Division, KSHS.

Oakes so aptly put it, “with the freed people in possession of their own labor and their old masters still in control of the land, the stage was set for a substantial reorganization of labor relations.”¹⁰ In other parts of the South, the sharecropping system emerged out of this labor vacuum and continued into the twentieth century. On the border, however, the small-scale slaveholding system that had been established during the 1820s and 1830s gave way to a society moving towards egalitarianism and equal rights, albeit slowly. White accounts of this demographic and political shift often used language laced with racial stereotypes about blacks’ ignorance and inability to function in free society, but at least some elements of Kansas society welcomed Exodusters as their new neighbors. According to one Topeka newspaper, these emigrants had valid reasons for coming north. “Having so long endured the woes and inhumanities of bondage,” the author wrote, “he would not willingly flee from his native soil, when emancipated, unless treated with unparalleled brutality.”¹¹ The author continued, writing that “the present movement would be strong presumptive proof, if there were no corroborating evidence, that the colored people of the south have been most foully dealt with by their white neighbors.”¹² Those who harbored some sympathies for these refugees—who sometimes entered the state with very few personal possessions and no money—did form aid organizations like the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association geared toward helping African Americans find employment and housing.

¹⁰ James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 196.

¹¹ “A Lesson of the Exodus,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 23, 1879.

¹² “A Lesson of the Exodus,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 23, 1879.

All was not well, though, as racial discrimination and intense prejudice toward black residents persisted through the Reconstruction period and beyond. Some families struggled to find jobs that paid a living wage, and they consequently could not save enough money to buy their own land. For instance, according to an 1886 case study of household earnings in Wyandotte County, Kansas, a town that received many refugees, the average Exoduster household received \$262.75 in annual wages, while white workers made \$333.09 per year.¹³ This racism and economic inequality often stemmed from caricatures of African Americans in popular culture, leading some whites to conclude that black emigrants were “lazy” or “immoral,” and true equality in the realm of civil rights remained a distant reality for many black Kansans.¹⁴

In the end, the Exodus was a continuation of African Americans’ fight for control over their own mobility, another chapter in the story of black resistance on the Kansas-Missouri border. In the years prior to the Civil War, slavery was an integral component of the frontier experience for both enslaved and white slaveholding residents. For slaveholders, slavery’s expansion into the West was central to their imaginings of progress and financial solvency, since these concepts were closely tied to their dedication to slavery. In fact, when comparing the border slave system to the institution as it existed elsewhere in the South, slaveholders were often quite successful in replicating the small-scale slaveholding formula in a new environment. By establishing themselves as leading citizens in these border counties, slaveowners

¹³ Painter, 257.

¹⁴ Painter, 260.

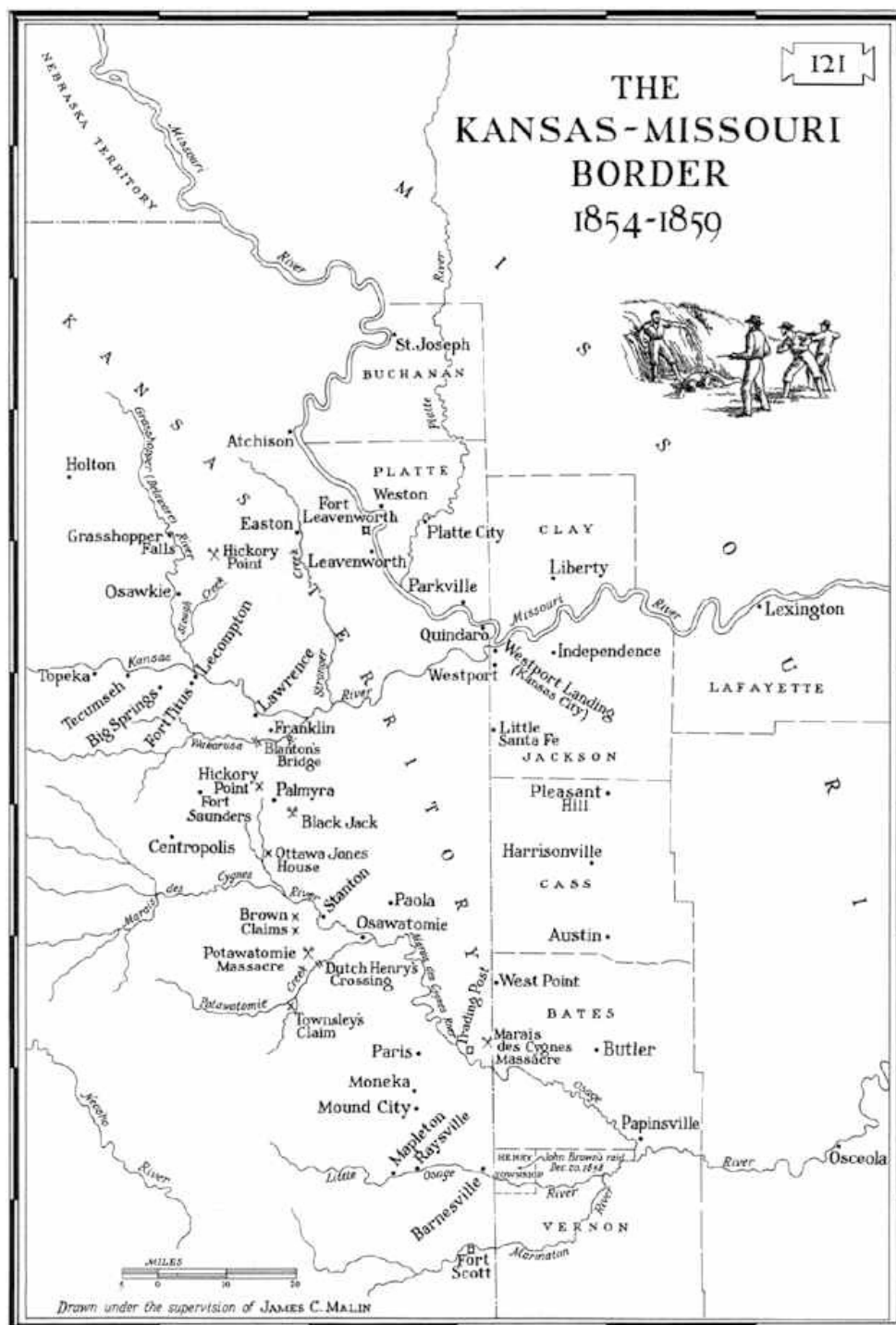
demonstrated how slavery was a system adaptable to different geographic and cultural contexts. They instituted controls over the enslaved population by passing legislation, creating slave patrols, abusing abolitionists, and issuing physical punishments for any action that threatened the racial hierarchy that was so necessary for the fundamental workings of the slave system. When the influx of free-state emigrants into Kansas Territory eclipsed Southern emigration, these slaveholders and their allies quickly launched a full-scale offensive to fend off Northern criticisms and to prevent the enslaved population from breaking free of their chains. They formed vigilant associations in “self defense,” ran for political office, voted illegally in the territorial election of 1855, and spoke boldly about their belief in slavery as an economic boon for both slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike.

Yet, these attempts at asserting hegemonic control were only partly successful. For African Americans, who often entered the border region unwillingly, it was possible to carve out opportunities for increased autonomy. These men and women struck back by taking control of their own movements across the landscape. They formed abroad marriages and friendships with slaves on other farms, engaged in physical altercations with slaveholders, negotiated additional privileges, found ways to make their own money, and escaped on the Underground Railroad. These same conflicts inevitably occurred between slaves and slaveowners living elsewhere in the Upper South. Still, the unique social demographics on the Kansas-Missouri line—a region that was simultaneously Western, Northern, and Southern—combined with the characteristics of a small-scale slave system in unprecedented ways. These markers included close contact between slaveholder and slave, varied forms of employment,

an active slave hiring market, and the prevalence of abroad marriages, all acting in concert to provide slaves with increased opportunities to control their own mobility. While the peculiar institution's continued existence was perpetuated through slaveholders' use of coercion and violence aimed at quelling all slave resistance, slaves often found ways to gain the upper hand.

In short, white rhetoric over the expansion of slavery may have taken center stage during the sectional conflict—if one goes by the historiographical trend of Bleeding Kansas scholarship in the last century— but slavery was a concrete, visible presence in these border counties. The enslaved men and women who lived along this border existed as more than just catalysts for heated debate. Bondspeople were not merely an artificially constructed symbol created to rally anti-slavery proponents to the cause. Within this region's boundaries are tales of the physical, emotional, and psychological hardships that defined both the tragedies and triumphs of the African American experience. For former slaves and former slaveholders who found themselves staying in the border region, their fortunes were once again linked, but this time, they joined in the task of creating a post-war social order unlike the slave system that had originally bound them together.

Map Appendix



James C. Malin, in *Atlas of American History*, ed. James Truslow Adams (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1943), plate 121. Reprinted courtesy of the Gale Group.

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